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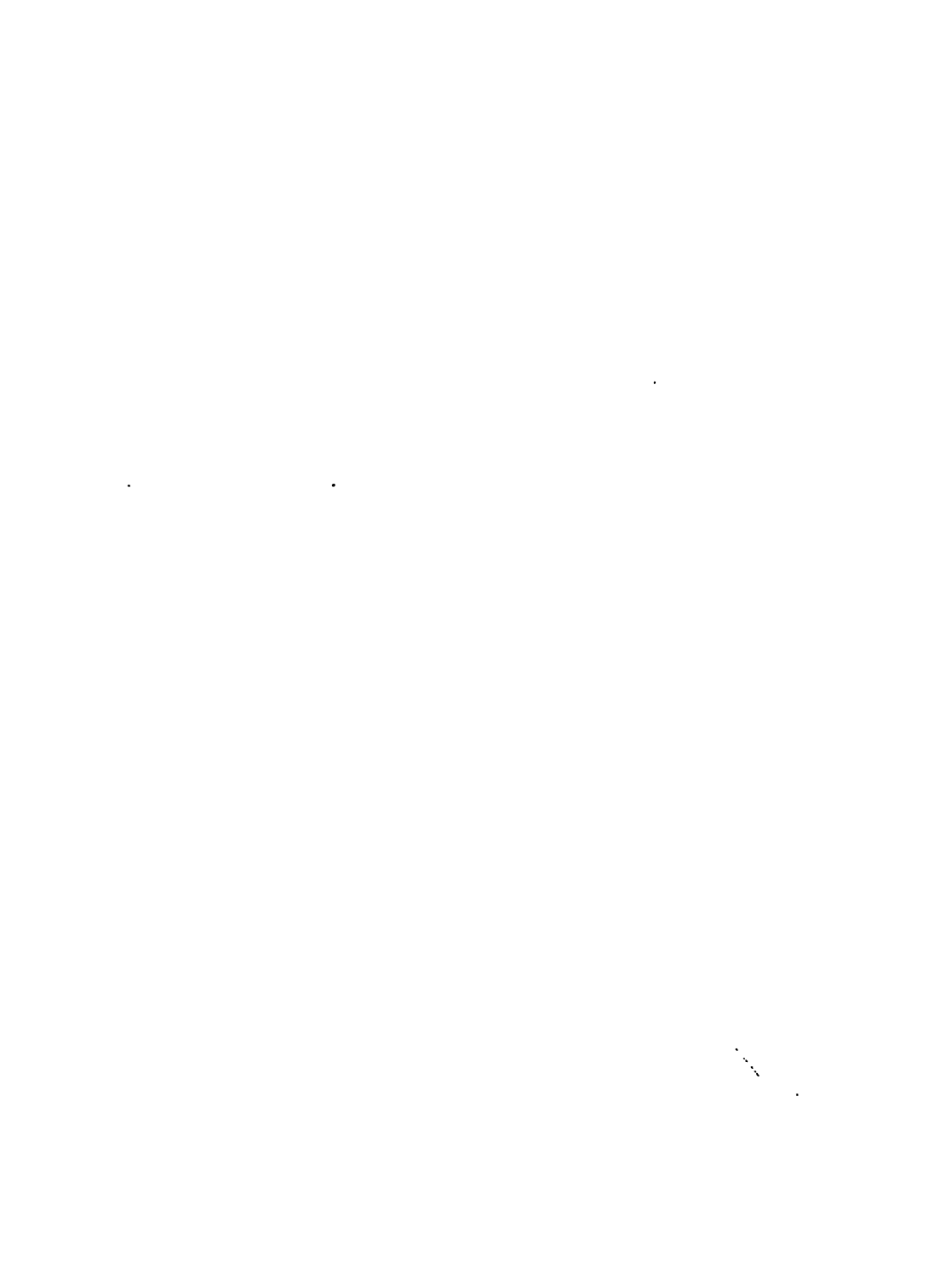
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The HEART CHORD



JOE
MITCHELL
CHAPPLE

1. Fiction, American





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"Blind, but now you see, Jane," he whispered, taking her in his arms. "The heart chord has sounded for us with the melody of love's sweet song"

—(See page 300)

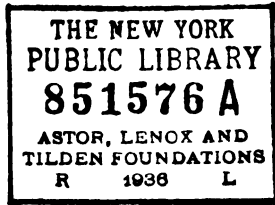
The
Heart Chord

*A story that just grew, unfolding widely-varied
phases of American life as viewed in editorial
work on a country weekly, daily
newspaper and magazine*

BY
JOE MITCHELL CHAPPLE



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ROY W. B.
J. B. B.
V. B. B.

PREFACE

WHILE it is the usual custom nowadays to publish novels without a Preface, a recurrence to the good old practice is suggested in the case of "Heart Chord." The old-fashioned preface is supposed to disclose the reason for the book—a sort of an overture, or warning as to what is to follow. There is a reason for "Heart Chord," clearly defined at least in the mind of the author. Modestly announced, it is a story that just grew. Without literary pretense, or to solve any momentous problems, it unfolds widely-varied phases of American life as viewed in editorial work, dealing with commonplaces in a way, still it is often the commonplace that reflects contemporaneous thought. There is no intricate

plot of wildly exotic impulse involved. It is simply a story—nothing more. The characters are just the folk that you meet every day. The author has not attempted to haloize the heroes and heroines—if there be such—nor are characters depicted, drawn and quartered as villains of the deepest dye.

The book is dedicated to the trilogy of Mother, Teacher, Wife, the influences shaping the destiny of almost every man.

THE AUTHOR.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- "Blind, but now you see, Jane," he whispered, taking her in his arms. "The heart chord has sounded for us with the melody of love's sweet song."*
- The landscape was here marked by two country roads diverging at an oblique angle from an old oak tree, said to be a historical landmark of the Indian wars.*
- The announcement came like a thunderbolt upon the meeting. "We'd lose her sometime—always said so," remarked the doctor emphatically.*
- "Mrs. Daniels, won't you sit down?" said Bart, gallantly, as she she swept into the room with the air of ease and confidence that comes to habitual café habitués.*
- There was a ripple of excitement in the court room over this sensational evidence. The judge was trying to quiet the crowd, while Peter, turning to the jury, continued, "Bill Boxeman is dead now, but he was a tough one." The little wife broke into tears, and the father turned white and clenched his hands at this evidence of a plot to blacken the name of his daughter.*
- There was a movement at the door and a bright face and dancing eyes appeared. He arose hurriedly. "Ah!" he said. "Oh!" echoed a voice that seemed to harmonize with the face and eyes.*
- The longed-for decision to appear as his attorney was given to Tony Turner, whom he found awaiting him at his office. The young man all but hugged Elbert in his joy.*
- They had decided to stop at the hotel where Henry Clay had lived. They were assigned to the very room where the Great Compromiser had breathed his last—so said the bellboy.*
- "Bart, I must see you. Sit down there, man, and listen to me. I've known you since you were knee-high to a grasshopper, but what I want to know is, can I help you?"*
- "Has it? 'Where from a tooth,'" he scratched, "'from a baby—where the wool is raised on our farms—where—the—farmer—the baby, the home—' He threw the pen down in disgust.*
- "Oh, he has not forgotten Mother Madigan, Jimmy's mother? Many's the good turn I've done him, mum," said she to Jane. "Done it on the sly, when the wires were crossed."*
- Elbert glanced toward the ladies' gallery and saw the face of Mrs. Daniels. She was applauding enthusiastically. The glance was an inspiration.*
- That evening they were sitting together on the veranda talking over the old days. . . . Elbert felt inspired with courage and a feeling of security to be again with the woman whose friendship mellowed in the memory of the past.*

THE HEART CHORD

CHAPTER I

IT was a community which could scarcely be called a village, and yet had pretensions beyond that of a cross-road. The name of Poplarville was no doubt inspired by the line of ridges thereabouts, which were fringed with tall, scraggly poplar trees. In the post office directory, however, it had mention of one line quite as extensive as a metropolis.

Located in a middle western state, it formed a center around which the current of emigration from the East and the South had crossed, following the westward march of empire—a sort of eddy as it were, undisturbed by the speculative fever immediately succeeding the Civil War. It was the sort of community to foster self-reliance in childhood, where youth was ever tinged with

romantic dreams of the world beyond the hills, and ambitious resolutions as to future activities were visioned early in life.

It is in communities like this that the little muddy creeks become great rivers in childish fancy; where the rolling hillock served as the prodigious mountain read about in the school geography; and where the old kiln and prosaic limestone quarries furnished the only spot for miles thereabouts, that could be metamorphosed into picturesque crags and castled summits. All this added something of poesy to the monotony of rural life.

The landscape was here marked by two country roads diverging at an oblique angle from an old oak tree, said to be an historical landmark of the Indian wars. Here, according to tradition, a noted Indian chieftain had fallen in battle. The children found stone arrow heads and other Indian relics in the fields nearby which proved to them conclusively the truth of the stories related by the old settlers, grouped around the stove in the winter time. Many cities of the West are said to have been located on old Indian camping grounds, and Poplarville

to this extent, at least, could lay just claim to distinction.

Directly opposite the old oak had stood a brother tree, which had fallen during a storm years ago, and later the trunk had been converted into a rustic seat, which tempted the loungers from dry-goods boxes by day, and offered a trysting place for lovers in the moonlight. A well and watering trough, flanked by a long hitching rack, stood nearby, and it was here that the teams were brought for their noonday feed, while the farmers gathered thereabouts and discussed crops, politics and the weather. The cobbler shop of Jasper Juniper on one side of the road, and the cottage of Minnie Mary Snow, a square, frame, unpretentious little house, standing opposite, were the only inhabited buildings located on this historic site—though a number of farmhouses, set off by great red barns and granaries, were not far away.

The church, store and blacksmith shop were located "forty rods up the road," as the neighborly guide would say. The reason for this straggling settlement is disclosed as the tale

is told. The peculiar angle formed by the two roads radiating from this spot, made an unusual break in the regularity of the township map, constituting a distinctive point in a section of country where rectangles marked out farms, square-mile sections and counties, on what might be termed a checker-board of gigantic proportions. Perhaps the only exception to this regularity of boundary was where a sluggish stream wound its leisurely way through the fields.

Lined on either side by tall poplar trees, these roads were further demarked by rough zig-zag rail fences, which in many instances remain a marked evidence of the hardworking pioneers, since railsplitting, as practiced in the days of our beloved Lincoln, had become a lost art. Real country roads they were, dust-clogged during the dry months, and almost impassable in the spring after the first thaws, when the wheel tracks became two deep ruts, through which the wagons wallowed hub-deep. Smartweed, milkweed, pigweed, in fact all species of weed known to local botanists, and those characteristic of swampy places, rioted in unmolested

profusion, and covered with the dust of the road which floated in puffy clouds above them whenever a team passed, leaving a dun-colored monotony to the otherwise beautiful landscape.

It was not so much through the surroundings as because of the people, that Poplarville was distinguished from the rest of the world. There were gathered there a group of characters forming a composite of American types. This varied cast gave to the community an unusual degree of human interest, enhanced in these days, when automobiles, telephones and trolley cars have made isolated and distinctive communities the exception.

Just now the event most talked of was the arrival of the new school teacher, Miss Jane Agnew, with her advanced ideas on "ventilation." Poplarville felt a special pride in its school, and the school board included nearly all of the mature male residents of the corner. There was Judge Tremour, an elegant and refined gentleman of sixty, who showed an active and personal interest in every pupil, and the fact that his diploma was given the most prominent place among all the pictures

in his home, evinced his interest in education. Dr. Buzzer, explosive and vigorous, but kind-hearted; Jasper Juniper, the sage cobbler who proudly emulated Hans Sachs of Nurnberg, and was continually reading "Plutarch's Lives"; Abner Tomer, the crusty old bachelor farmer, who held mortgages and who seemed also to hold his breath when he talked for fear of wasting it. The community appeared to dwell in harmony, with just enough differences now and then to suggest a "family jar."

The young teacher, Miss Agnew, scarcely turned eighteen, had begun of her school work with inexhaustible energy. Among other innovations, she organized a village lyceum, and the selection of one of the girls as president caused an open revolt among the older boys. This uprising was led by Elbert Ainsworth, a bright lad who was considered the prize pupil of the school.

"We'll not stand for petticoat rule," said Elbert one day after school, and his companions nodded mute agreement. That night the inherent college hazing spirit took possession of the boys, whose imaginations had been fired with the tales of frontier heroes.

Two of the smaller boys who had given some assistance in making feminine rule possible, were given a bath under the old pump at the corner, and were being lustily bounced in a blanket when Jasper Juniper appeared, and the participants scattered. The next day there were mysterious conferences among the pupils, and Elbert became the hero of the hour. The event had quelled the spirit of a timid opposition, but had encouraged mutiny against the gentle-mannered but strong-minded young instructor.

"Elbert Ainsworth will remain after school," she announced at the close of the day's session. A muffled rustle of surprise was manifest in the schoolroom, and Elbert's pride was brought low. He was about to rise with a defiant refusal, but a glimpse of the flashing blue eyes and flushed face of the little teacher and her quiet look of determination checked him.

"I'll stay and have some fun with little Miss Squipps," he whispered to his comrades as they filed out to the march played on the wheezy cabinet organ—another one of those "new ideas" of the teacher.

Elbert was mistaken in Jane Agnew, who, although not by any means a beautiful girl, had a gentle earnestness of manner, and a frank smile, which altogether transformed her delicate face. She was a plucky little soul, determined to make her way in the world. All who met her felt she was one whose character or personality seemed to unfold gently in sympathetic response.

When Elbert was left alone with her there was an awkward silence, broken finally by her declaration:

"Elbert, I must punish you; it was very wrong and cowardly of you to treat the smaller boys in such a fashion."

"Well, whip me, if you dare," challenged Elbert defiantly. "But I tell you, you'll regret it."

"I do regret it now," said Miss Agnew as she reached for the rawhide whip. "I'd much prefer to rule my school with love and respect—but I am determined to rule some way."

With whip upraised, she started to bring it down upon the strong young shoulders, but

catching the startled, strange look in the eyes of the lad, her arm wavered.

"I can't do it," she cried, as she dropped into a seat and burst into nervous tears. "I cannot, I just cannot do it," she sobbed, making a strong effort to master her emotion.

Elbert could not resist tears, and started toward her. "Whip me, whip me, I deserve it."

"Oh, it's no use, I cannot do it."

"You must," broke in Elbert, "and I won't mind it."

"No," she said finally, "I will never teach school with a whip." A note of wistfulness crept into her voice. "If I could only have the help of you older boys, it would mean so much to me." And rising, she pushed the whip aside.

"You will not be troubled with me any more, Miss Agnew, I'm going to help you," said Elbert earnestly.

"Thank you, Elbert," she said simply.

"You can depend on me, Miss Agnew," he said on leaving, and she knew he meant it.

Alone in the schoolroom, Jane realized that

life is a struggle. There is something in the oppressive atmosphere and quiet of a deserted schoolroom, after a day of trouble and worry, that tests the heart of the teacher—but a shower of tears cleared the murky atmosphere of the sultry September day.

CHAPTER II

AT the very outset of her Poplarville career, Miss Agnew had introduced many new ideas. Rules in arithmetic were not to be committed to memory, but the pupils were required to state in their own words, the why and how of various problems; physics was taught by actual experiments; botany was studied in the open fields, with just enough latitude and liberty to give it zest. She brought her own books for the pupils to read, and a book-shelf containing ten leather-bound volumes of an old encyclopedia adorned one corner of the schoolroom, formerly draped by cobwebs. The students were allowed to consult these books during school hours without asking permission, and they were beginning to learn to feel the responsibility of being trusted to do the right thing. Each recitation assumed the form of chat between teacher and pupils.

The parents and school board were not easily converted to the idea of breaking away

from the old district school conventionalities, but the new teacher had won the hearts of her pupils, and they were so staunchly loyal to her that remonstrance against Jane Agnew and her ideas was futile. The lyceum flourished, and officered by the teacher and her boys and girls, its Friday evening meetings became the chief social event of the week. Elbert Ainsworth belonged to the June graduating class, and its members were to receive the first diplomas ever granted by a Poplarville school—another of Miss Agnew's innovations.

A few months prior to the time of graduation, Elbert's father died suddenly and left him alone with his grieving mother. It was a hard blow for the lad, for his father had been a companion and counselor, but it was that very trial test which soon made the boy a man. Though he was urged by his mother and teacher to continue his studies and graduate as he had planned, he felt that he must now become a bread-winner.

"I must make my own way in the world," he said with spirit. "This short year of school life has taught me to think, and has given me

a real thirst for knowledge and a determination to succeed in life."

"Be careful, Elbert, you have scarcely begun to live," said Miss Agnew, "and if you only remain here—"

"What! Stay and rust away like a piece of old iron?" he asked in surprise. "No, I must go into the world. It is hard to leave, but don't you worry, Miss Agnew, no one will ever have to blush for me."

A "farewell party" expressive of the social sympathies of the people, was given him by his schoolmates. The evening's merry-making concluded with boisterous "good-byes," and surreptitiously moistened eyes. The village girls admired Elbert as a hero for daring to go away from home and seek adventure in the big city world of which they had read. He had always been a leader among the boys, who felt that they would sorely miss him.

"What will we do with the old cave, Wildy?" whispered "Sorghum" sadly.

"Oh, well, some one else will join, boys," replied Elbert. But "Shandy" and "Sorghum" looked dubious. The cave in the woods which

the boys had made a mysterious retreat after the fashion indicated in the then popular yellow-covered literature, was likely to be deserted after the Robin Hood of Poplarville had left his devoted comrades.

Among the last to bid him farewell was his school teacher. He walked home with her. It had become a proud distinction among the school-boys to be Miss Agnew's escort, and on Elbert's last night in Poplarville he was accorded that honor. He rather enjoyed the heroic distinction of "leaving home," and talked to Miss Agnew of his great ambitions and hopes for the future.

"Yes, Miss Agnew, with the example of Abraham Lincoln and of our other great men to give us hope and stimulate us, there is no limit to what one may hope to do in life."

"Aim to do big things, Elbert, but always remember to be true to the noblest ideals of manhood. Disappointments often prepare us for success. May you have just enough of them to appreciate the real joys of life. Good-bye and good luck."

Elbert felt that he was now to live in earnest.

The old cottonwood trees in the school yard were shedding their downy seeds, which floated away to take root in new environments, suggestive of his own prospective plans.

* * *

The next morning found Jane Agnew seated on the front veranda opening a big fat envelope that had just come in the mail. It contained a fine photograph of two sturdy young business men, standing side by side. Jane could not repress her pleasure. She was still studying longingly the photograph when Nikita Crackovitz, a gypsy washer-woman, appeared, with a bundle. Nikita appeared to be a simple-minded woman, and although she would leave Poplarville for weeks at a time, nothing was thought of her mysterious absences, because she was a gypsy.

"Good morning, Nikita—the washing ready so soon?"

Nikita, looking curiously over her shoulder, suggested, "A new picture, Miss Jane?"

"Yes," replied Jane, absorbed in the picture.

"Ah! That man—he a good friend of yours?" Nikita asked shrewdly.

down a volume of Plutarch from the shelf over his head, and looked out through the weather-beaten door of his shop, to watch for the approach of the hastily-summoned school board. Several members came in, some out of breath, others with pretentious dignity, and appropriated the various stools, boxes and chairs in Jasper's shop without unnecessary ceremony. After the usual confusion, Judge Tremour, in his calm and dignified way, called the meeting to order, and the usual minute of unanimous silence ensued.

"Here, Judge, take this chair," said Jasper, with habitual deference.

"'Pears as if Jasper must always toady to the Jedge. I wouldn't do it," mumbled Abner Tomer from his place in the corner.

"Well, gentlemen," said Judge Tremour, buttoning his long frock coat, "this meeting is called at the request of our teacher, who complains of the bad ventilation of the school-house."

"Oh, I didn't know it was ventilation she wanted. I thought it was pure air—so'm told," growled Abner.

"Humph! Don't know the difference," broke in Shandy Groff in a loud whisper just outside the door.

"Has any gentleman any suggestion to offer?" inquired the Judge in his gentle voice, rubbing his hands softly together.

"Mr. President," said Dr. Buzzer, "I am inclined to open correspondence with an association of improved plumbers looking to any offers."

"I say stick to hum," broke in Abner. "If you want more air, open the winders. She keeps 'em open, so'm told."

"Abner, you are always behind the times," said Jasper. "Now, Bacon says the gray matter in the brain—"

"I don't care whether bacon, liver or light says it," broke in Abner.

"Gentlemen, you are wandering away from the subject," interposed the Judge mildly.

"Well, I move that our secretary be empowered to consult leading authorities on ventilation. They know the latest improved methods—always said so," said Dr. Buzzer, feeling that he had fully settled the matter.

Minnie Mary had come out of her cottage and stood listening to the discussion.

"I say old ways suit me," said Minnie Mary with emphasis. "Open the windows and doors, march the children around three times—shut the windows, and there you are."

"Judge, I say give the teacher her own way; get what she wants; you see, each scholar ought to have the privilege to breathe his own air and no one else's," piped Shandy from the doorway.

"Shandy, sit down; you are not a member of this board," said Dr. Buzzer, taking him by the shoulder.

"Got more sense than some of 'em," commented Minnie Mary, starting for another pail of water.

"Jasper, you just read them the law from Plutarch; see how the ancient Romans managed ventilation; human lungs are the same today as then," said the Judge.

"Always said so," chimed in Buzzer.

"Roman cranks and Iowa cranks line up pretty much alike," gurgled Shandy outside.

"Has any gentleman any resolution to offer?" inquired the Judge.

"I move that ventilation be laid on the table," snarled Abner.

"Is there a second?" inquired the Judge, waiting.

There was an awkward silence.

A boy came in the door and handed a note to Jasper, with the comment: "It's from Miss Agnew."

"Please read the letter, Jasper," interposed the Judge.

"To the Honorable Board of Education"—ahem—"I hereby resign my position as teacher of the Poplarville school, the resignation to take effect immediately. Jane Agnew."

The announcement came like a thunderbolt upon the meeting. "We'd lose her sometime—always said so," remarked the doctor emphatically.

"The contract runs for another year, so'm told," objected Abner.

Just then Miss Agnew appeared at the open door, and the Judge greeted her with all the courtesy of his undergraduate days.

"I say, Miss Agnew, can't you continue another year?"

"Judge, there is a personal reason why I cannot do so. I love my work, but—there is a reason, Judge, and I—I—" Jane hesitated and blushed prettily. It did not take long for each individual member of the board to surmise her secret.

"Goin' to be married, b'gosh," said Shandy, jumping up and rushing out. The news was spread.

"Gentlemen, if there are no objections, Miss Agnew's resignation is accepted with profound regret," said the Judge.

"You have made the school a great success; always said so," echoed Dr. Buzzer, "and we hope your pathway will be strewn with great joy, lovely flowers, and all the peace and happiness life can bring," continued the Doctor, with a courtly bow, awkwardly imitating the gallantry of the Judge.

The school board meeting adjourned *sine die*, and Poplarville really did have something to talk about.

CHAPTER IV

ALTHOUGH intensely curious, Poplarville had never known the intimate details of Jane's life, so Poplarville, along with Minnie Mary, just concluded that she grew some place.

In days gone by, when the great middle west was an immense area of free homestead lands, Chalmers Agnew, her father, had come from Kentucky with his bride, to a farm located near a picturesque Indiana village on the banks of the Wabash.

There was bitter strife in Hoosierdom at the time between the new and the old order of things. The young bride did not come with a *few* household goods and home-spun dresses. She brought with her, silk dresses, veils and gloves, which quite shocked the community living their simple frontier life. It was revolting to their intense religious beliefs which might have been tempered with a tinge of the envy which created so much trouble

even in the wise Solomon's day. Their remarks and coolness made it so uncomfortable for the young wife that she soon gave up her finery and became "like one of us, children of the Lord." The first Sunday at the little chapel at Mount Ariel struck terror to the heart of the newcomer. The hymn:

"I've enlisted for the war,
And will fight until I die."

was sung in an intensely realistic manner, and one exhorting circuit rider evangelist stirred her to put her handsome earrings in the contribution box, to be sold to help convert the heathen.

As time went on, both adapted themselves to the new order of things, but the husband drifted into reading Tom Paine's books, and it was secretly whispered about the village that he possessed a set of Voltaire, and had joined an atheistic society at Indianapolis, when he served in the State Legislature.

When Jane, their only child, was about five years old, Chalmers Agnew was injured while felling a tree. "A visitation of the Lord," was the general verdict among the church people. As he lay dying, a doctor and his wife

came from Indianapolis; the neighbors were alarmed and some even objected to "caring for an infidel," as if there was danger of contagion. The nurse kept away outsiders, and it was said to be for the purpose of preventing Agnew from "confessing the Lord on his death-bed." Just before he died, an appealing glance to his wife and daughter told them the story. He was denied a funeral service, also a grave in the little burying ground in the rear of the church; and on the following Sunday the preacher, instead of offering consolation to the sorrowing widow, thundered out in his sermon a bitter denunciation of "that pernicious infidel, Agnew." Mrs. Agnew did not long survive her husband.

Jane was adopted into the family of a jolly, bluff and big-hearted farmer named Waldie, who treated her as one of his own. With his two sons, Bart and Wesley, Jane was educated as well as the means of the farmer would permit. When the boys were of age, they left for Chicago to make their fortunes, having taken up the building trade while that great metropolis was in the making.

With the death of farmer Waldie, and his wife a year later, the old home was broken up and for the first time Wesley, the younger of the two brothers, realized that Jane could no longer remain only a sister to him. The close companionship of childhood days had ripened into a deeper affection.

"Jane, my dear," he said, "the old home is gone, but we'll start anew." And Jane plighted her troth to the boy she loved the most in all the world.

Wesley and Jane were to be married as soon as he could provide a home in the city. Reverses came, which delayed the marriage, and it was then that Wesley wrote, "I want a home for my childhood's sweetheart and my life's inspiration. Never mind, Jane, it will come out all right."

It was after these discouragements that Jane decided to teach the village school at Poplarville. Then it was that Wesley had written that the house was ready and she must come to Chicago, and Jane's resignation to the school board followed. They were to be married in their own home on the day following her arrival,

and Jane was eager to inspect the new house with Wesley.

"I'm so happy, Jane," said Wesley, as they entered the little cottage. "Every time Bart and I come here to inspect the work we think of you."

The girl was supremely happy as Wesley stooped and kissed her. "My own true heart, Jane! I am so happy!" Arm in arm, they walked about inspecting the new home that would be theirs.

"The china closet is for your new dishes, and these drawers for the linen; no water to carry. Here you can have flowers. Isn't it snug, Jane?"

"Oh, Wesley, it's all perfectly lovely, and I'm so happy. This large window is just the place for the birds. Here we will put the piano, and there the picture of mamma." With a woman's intuition, she seemed to know at a glance, just how to make the most of her surroundings.

"Yes, dear," he said proudly, "This is our home, and we'll be so happy."

"How sweet life is, Wesley! Our own home to be!" whispered Jane, radiant with love and happiness.

CHAPTER V

HOW brief were these moments of youthful hopes! Newspaper readers in Chicago had their usual murder mystery the following day. Wesley Waldie, the young contractor of the firm of Waldie & Waldie, had been found dead in his office the previous evening, killed by a blow on the head with a stone bottle containing writing fluid. The safe had been rifled, apparently the work of burglars. Bart had waited for him that afternoon later than usual, but supposed Wesley had remained with Jane, talking over the arrangements for the wedding on the morrow. He returned that evening to the office, and found his brother lying on the floor. Black footprints from the spilled ink, and blood were traced some distance, and then disappeared. The mystery whittled the zest of reporters and baffled the detectives. Several arrests were made on strong circumstantial evidence, but the murderer had covered the tracks well.

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The landscape was here marked by two country roads diverging at an oblique angle from an old oak tree, said to be a historical landmark of the Indian wars

Jane was prostrated by the terrible tragedy. The little school teacher put away her trousseau, and her adopted brother Bart took her back to Poplarville where the school board had unanimously accepted her offer to again take up the work.

"Wesley, Wesley, my heart is broken," moaned Jane, as they journeyed back to their little Iowa village.

"It was a hard blow for all of us, little girl," said Bart, "but you still have your big brother Bart."

Bart Waldie returned to Chicago and prospered, making frequent visits to Poplarville to see Jane. He was all that a devoted brother should be, and Jane always looked forward with keen pleasure to his visits. The sudden blow which bereft him of a brother upon whom he had depended so much in his struggle for success had left its impress, and his frequent visits and letters did much to allay the bitter grief of Jane; the death of Wesley brought them closer together than they had been before.

About a year after the tragedy, Bart and Jane walked down the old lane at Poplarville.

Bart's dark eyes gleamed with an unwonted tenderness, but a pained look came over his face when Jane spoke of continuing her Poplarville school another year.

"Sit down, little sister, I want to talk to you," he said. "Now, Jane, that home in Chicago is yours just as much as though Wesley were alive. His interest in the business remains the same—the same as if you had been married."

"O Bart, you are too generous," said Jane, looking up through her tears. "It was so sudden—his death—"

"It was a hard blow for you, Jane."

"And you've been so good to me—such a noble brother."

"Jane, Jane, I—I—" said Bart, drawing closer to her.

"Why, Bart, what is it, you look pale—come, perhaps we'd better return."

"Jane, I cannot hope to take Wesley's place in your heart, but I love you more than anyone else in the world. You've been my one ideal."

"O Bart, you are so good, but I must be honest with you. My heart, my life was given to Wesley."

"Jane, I will not ask you to forget, but in the struggle of life I am lonely—so lonely; we are both lonely. Why not live our lives together?"

"But Bart, how can I marry you, loving and mourning Wesley?"

"Just try, I love you Jane," said Bart softly.

"It seems cruel to break—"

"Say yes, Jane, yes."

In the soft twilight she saw before her the boy she had always admired—the boy who had shielded Wesley and her, the strong, stalwart Bart. Could admiration fill her aching heart? The winds stirred the old willows by the roadside.

"Come," said Bart, and half consenting, she found herself in his strong arms. The kiss that night was different from the greetings of other years. Bart was supremely happy—he had won his first great victory.

Like many women, Jane was willing to let herself drift into caring for him, willing to place herself in the hands of fate, for there seemed to be nothing else to do.

CHAPTER VI

IT was a favorite pastime for the Judge, Jasper and Dr. Buzzer to talk over old days and new problems in the cobbler shop every morning about nine o'clock. "We transplant the bone and sinew of the country to the city," was the verdict agreed upon.

Elbert's departure for Chicago had been, at the time, the absorbing topic of discussion in the cobbler shop, and grave doubts were expressed by the Poplarville triumvirate as to how Elbert was making out in the great city. "Many of the great merchants, railroad builders and leading professional men were born in the country," said the Doctor.

"You're right," echoed Jasper.

"They have the primal strength of the soil, and that virile spirit of self-reliance of which city children are deprived. Nearly every country boy who goes to the city succeeds in a way," said the Judge, watching Jasper give a final tap to a shoe before throwing it down.

It was early March when Elbert arrived in Chicago, and the cold, bleak winds sweeping in from the lake, chilled him to the marrow. The pavements, checkered with dark pools of snow, ice and black mud, and the air thick with soot-laden mist, gave anything but a pleasant tinge to Elbert's first impressions of the city. The trees in the parks were gaunt and bare, and the rush and rattle of traffic, the apparently heartless struggle on the crowded streets, and the dull weather made him feel the first bitter pangs of homesickness. He studied the newspaper advertisements for a situation and made numerous applications to the addresses indicated, for employment as waiter, porter, hostler or elevator boy, but each time he was turned away with the remark that they wanted only experienced help.

"Am I not fit for something?" he thought as he passed up Dearborn Street in the evening at the time when all the clerks were hurrying homeward. Into many of the strange faces he looked as though expecting to see some one from Poplarville. There were some who looked like Jasper, the Judge, or the Doctor; even one

that looked like Shandy—but it was not he. He wondered if they all had homes—and mothers.

Finding a cheap boarding house, he took lodgings, and morning after morning he continued his search for work, without success. A week later he found employment carrying bricks on an office building then being erected. It was hard work, but he was busy and earning money. He was throwing the bricks out of a cart when he heard some one hail him.

“Hello, El; ‘bricks without straw’? well, I never!”

It was Ned Housle, the brother of Kittie Housle, Elbert’s childhood sweetheart. His pride was stung at first, but he replied, “Yes, it is better than buying gold bricks.”

Ned was one of those sporty young men who so often come to Chicago, using his father’s money to see the sights, and was regarded as a “city fellow” in Poplarville. A short time before he had lost a large amount of his fathers money through gambling with card sharks.

“Aw, forget it,” said Ned. “Come around tonight and we’ll have a time taking in the sights.”

"Can't do it, Ned. I must sleep nights to hold this job."

"Gee, you're green, but the sap won't last. So long."

Ned passed on. Elbert was glad to have seen someone from home, and he carried his bricks with a lighter heart, even if it was only Ned Housle whom he had seen. Still, to think that Kittie's brother should find him a hod-carrier, wounded his pride.

That afternoon he dropped a hod of bricks while walking on a scaffold. The contractor happened to be inspecting the work just then.

"Look after that man, Jim," he said to the foreman. "He'll be dropping bricks on some one's head yet and bring us a damage suit."

Contractor Bartholomew Waldie was a man of quick decision. His curly hair and bristling, stubby mustache were contradictions. He was known as Bart, and while his black eyes snapped, they could soften with a liquid light in a flash. It was evident that he was a thorough organizer. He not only employed superintendents, but superintended his superintendents and watched every detail of the work. The

men called him Boss Bart, and he was recognized as a loyal and just friend to them.

Elbert was discharged for his carelessness, and began the weary search for work again. With only an occasional day of employment, Elbert had nearly absorbed his money, and saving what little he had left for meals, he slept in a railway station, where he had noticed that immigrants remained for the night on their way westward. He was wont to cuddle upon a hard seat in a dark corner, and thus braced against the iron arms, spend the long aching night dreaming of better luck and home.

One night a policeman shook him.

"Where are you going, young man?"

"To sleep, if I can," said Elbert drowsily.

"Well, I think not, sir; come, get up; you'll have to move out of this."

"I've no place else to sleep."

"That's the old fake. Well, then, come to the station."

"The police station?" said Elbert, now thoroughly awakened and incredulous. "I've done nothing, and you can't take me."

"Oh, can't I? Well, I'll show you, kid. Come along and no back talk."

"I won't do it."

"You won't!"

At that he struck Elbert with his club, and grabbed his arm. Elbert resisted, and they clinched. Another policeman arrived and soon they had Elbert on the way to the station. As they passed the great massive buildings, Elbert wondered if these were really habitations of human beings. Was there no place for a boy out of work except in jail? In jail! What would his mother think? What would his old teacher think? And how could he explain it? As he mingled with the crowd of vagrants Elbert felt that the world was entirely wrong. His reflections, bitter and revengeful, were such as lead to anarchy as the only possible solution. Who has the right to invoke law and punish the homeless for the crime of poverty? After a time, his bitterness subsided. He was now facing the stern realities of life.

How happy and secure were those boys at home after all, even if they were only drifting along in an aimless and colorless existence,

lounging on drygoods boxes and about the sunny corner in front of Jasper's shop.

The next morning was a bright and beautiful day. He recalled that this was about the time he would have been planning for graduation day at school—and preparing his oration. The odor of the police station was stifling and he felt relieved as he was brought into the court room before the justice.

"My boy," said the judge, "you are charged with resisting an officer. Are you guilty?"

"I resisted him because he struck me."

"Go on with you, that's a——" broke in Officer Flaherty.

"Silence! I'm hearing this case," interjected the court.

"Were you drunk or disorderly?" he continued.

"No, sir; I was only trying to sleep, and—and—" he stopped, trying to hide the hot tears which sprang to his eyes.

"The old gag again," chimed in the policeman.

"Be quiet, Flaherty," sternly commanded

the judge. "What did you find on the prisoner's person?"

"Sixty cents, your honor, and this book?"

"It's a little pocket testament my mother gave me," said Elbert quietly.

"The same old Bible fake again," mumbled Flaherty.

The judge took the little book and read the inscription on the fly leaf, then turning away from Elbert, said: "The prisoner is discharged!"

CHAPTER VII

LEAVING the court room, Elbert breathed a sigh of relief, and was almost tempted to give up the struggle to gain a foothold in the city and to return home. At the post office he found a letter from his mother. It was filled with the account of many little incidents of home life. "There is no one here to help me with my work as you used to do, but everything goes on all right, although I miss you so much."

Through the kindly interest of a teacher in a mission where he had gone to sleep when without funds, he was given the position of assistant janitor in a library. This position was the turning point in Elbert's Chicago career. The story of Lincoln studying by the light of pine knots inspired him, and every spare moment was concentrated upon good reading. Once his real thirst for knowledge, implanted in the schoolroom at Poplarville

was known, he found plenty of helpers, and for the first time began to feel that there were real "home folks" in the city after all.

He became so absorbed in his new work that he neglected to write home regularly, and had almost forgotten about his old school teacher and her expected arrival in Chicago. Now he remembered that nearly a year had elapsed since his mother had written him of Miss Agnew's resignation, and that she was to have been married. The fact was now recalled to him by a brief mention in a letter from his mother, in which she referred to his old teacher as Mrs. Bartholomew Waldie, and stated that she lived in Chicago, somewhere on Michigan Avenue.

On learning that she was now in the city, Elbert resolved to call upon her. He found the house to be one of those small but comfortable homes of growing Chicago, grouped in a locality almost as isolated as in a village. The routine of home life consisted in a daily visit to the grocery, meat market, and bakery, or even an occasional call at the pharmacy; a trip now and then down town for shopping and theater

was almost an event, for the monotony of life was as fixed as that in the country.

There was no reason why Bart Waldie should recognize in the trim looking Elbert the boy who was discharged for dropping his hod of bricks over a year before. Nor did Elbert recall the circumstance at their meeting. As Elbert was introducing himself, Jane came forward.

"Well, Elbert, I'm so glad to see you," she cried, taking both his hands in hers, and looking at him affectionately.

Elbert was enthusiastic and buoyant in his hopes, and told of what he had been studying at odd hours in the library.

"And it's all due to your advice and inspiration," he said to Mrs. Waldie, with a courteous bow.

While the conversation of the hour chiefly concerned Poplarville, Bart Waldie listened quietly, and was quite impressed with Elbert's enthusiasm. "Bright and energetic young fellows always appeal to me," said Bart after the visit was over. From that time Elbert was invited to spend his Sundays with the Waldies.

"Young man, you ought to study law," said Waldie some time later.

"I'd like to very much, but it requires money. A young fellow can't put up undeveloped brains and ambition as collateral at the banks."

"But there are always those ready to help deserving young men."

"Perhaps my chance will come some day."

"It's going to come right now," said Bart with a jovial slap on the shoulder.

"Do you mean it? Why, I couldn't—"

"Of course you can; a friend did it for me. I'm just passing it along," and Bart Waldie hit Elbert another resounding thwack on the shoulder. "Mrs. Waldie has suggested that perhaps if you had the opportunity to study law you would succeed. We both have faith in you."

"And you are both very kind. I shall certainly hope to merit your confidence."

"Never fear, my gospel is simple—always stick to your friends."

"Trust me for that, Mr. Waldie," said Elbert, as they shook hands warmly in parting.

Waldie had begun a political career in a small way, and had met with good success.

He liked Elbert, and felt he was a young man who would be helpful. At the last election Waldie had been placed in charge of a ward and had won for his party a decisive victory. He worked systematically and scientifically, for he was under the fascination of political maneuvers. In fact, he was becoming known as one of the coming men at the City Hall. He was a good fellow and generous to friends and almost every voter in his precinct was known to him. "Bart" was a favorite with the working men, and was proudly pointed out as a man who "stays by his friends."

"We need a young fire-eater talker, and Ainsworth will fill the bill," said Waldie to his wife. "Studying law will put him right in line."

Mrs. Waldie was delighted with her husband's determination to assist Elbert.

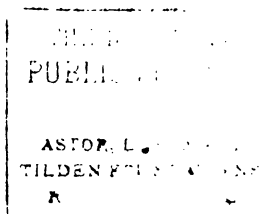
"You are very kind, Bart," she said. "Elbert is a fine boy."

"I pleased you, my dear, and pleased myself too. Young fellows with that kind of stuff in them always appeal to me."

That night Elbert was too happy to sleep.



The announcement came like a thunderbolt upon the meeting. "We'd lose her sometime—always said so," remarked the doctor emphatically



Visions of becoming a lawyer and reaching the eminence of Daniel Webster and Charles Sumner came before him. He arose at midnight and wrote to his mother a long letter full of enthusiasm and hope.

Elbert began his law studies in earnest. It was a hard struggle and he could allow himself but little leisure—no theatres or luxuries, and not even a visit home; but in later years he recalled his early struggles in Chicago as the happy days of his life.

“Mother, I am coming home when I can hang up my shingle as a lawyer,” he wrote in one of his letters. When, at last, he did walk out a full-fledged lawyer, he pinched himself vigorously to try to realize that he was at last an “attorney-at-law.” He was quite surprised to find that there was actually so little change in himself. He had learned that there are few abrupt changes in life, and that attainment comes by successive steps rather than at a single bound.

He had come to look upon Bart as a father, and no longer felt the terrible loneliness of a poor and friendless stranger in the city. Life

now seemed to open with golden prospects for him, and ambitions awakened; he began to think more than he would like to have confessed of the sweet face of the girl in the old home town.

CHAPTER VIII

WALDIE'S business flourished as his political success advanced; in fact, the pride of commercial prestige resulted in a deeper interest in politics until it eventually supplanted his interest in his business. This situation was viewed with alarm by Jane, who seemed to sense approaching trouble. Bart had just announced the necessity of another trip to Springfield on political business.

"Bart, I dislike to think of you as being so deep in politics," said his wife one day, "there are so many distractions from our home life."

"Don't fear for me, Jane," he said, laughing. "Elbert and I are going to reform political methods in Chicago. He is a bright young chap, a natural-born politician."

"I don't like politics, Bart, the class of men who—"

"Tut, tut, that's the old notion. Why, in a few years you women will be voting, and then

looks. The money is used to get bad men to refrain from defeating good measures, as well as to get good men to vote for bad measures."

"I see—it works both ways."

"You bet—that's it—. Politics work both ways. Come on up with me to Room 48."

They went upstairs and there found two clerks busy writing letters in a room filled with state law-makers. At one side whisky, cigars, and other adjuncts of convivial hospitality were provided for all comers, and in an inner room the jovial leader sat with his arm about "one of the boys" talking over the bill which was to come before the legislature on the following day.

"Sure, he's our friend," said a lobbyist, walking out with his hands on the shoulders of two members, and talking very earnestly, his cigar atilt.

"Hello, Bart, old boy; how are you?" was his greeting, and then Elbert was introduced to the inner circle of the sovereign state government.

Elbert was deeply impressed with the contrasted phases of government in actual opera-

tion and the theories that he had studied in school, but said little about it after he and Bart had returned home that night. In fact, their conversation had lost all touch with politics when there was a ring at the door, a card presented.

"Mrs. Daniels of Washington," said Bart, reading the card. "Oh, yes, Senator Forthwith's friend."

Elbert instinctively felt that another phase of modern government was to be disclosed and as the lady entered he left the room.

A glance revealed a woman in the very early prime of life, attired richly in the latest fashion, and yet not overdressed. She had the assured stateliness of a society leader, the ability to talk business with the men, and yet always retained the charm of a cultivated woman. She knew her world and the vanities thereof, and yet was not so eager to appear worldly wise.

"Mrs. Daniels, won't you sit down?" said Bart, gallantly, as she swept into the room with the air of ease and confidence that comes to habitual café and hotel habitants.

"I have called, Mr. Waldie, at the request

of Senator Forthwith of the Appropriation Committee, with this letter of introduction. You will notice that the Senator desires that you see Mr. Terrington tonight and wire Whitefield at Jacksonville to see that Congressman Hallet is present when the bill comes up. There is a little matter involved in the River and Harbor bill," she continued in an easy way, but Bart broke in to check the flow of information.

"Yes."

"I learned indirectly before leaving Washington that your chances for the marshalship are remarkably good; you will likely be appointed, and I am instructed to ask you to carry out the provisions of this letter."

"Let me see," said Bart, consulting the letter. "Check for two thousand dollars, personal expenses, um! Letter from me introducing Mrs. Daniels to the governor, um! One thousand dollars. Is this all on our bill, Mrs. Daniels?"

"It should be twice as much."

"Um! and when is my appointment to go to the Senate, do you say?"

"At once. There will be ten men on the payroll as inspectors, two consulships, minor of course, one clerkship in a department—awaiting the deserving, you know."

Jane entered the room and Bart went toward her.

"Ah, my wife; Mrs. Daniels of Washington, my dear." There was a quick^r mental duel between the two women.

"From Washington? A beautiful city. Shall you make a long stay in Chicago?" said Jane.

"No, I am here only for a few days; that is, here and at Springfield, where Mr. Waldie," she said, writing, "is operating a little machine."

"Why, Mrs. Daniels, I am surprised," broke in Jane, "Mr. Waldie stands for clean government."

Bart moved uneasily in his chair, and Mrs. Daniels, with a quick look from one to the other, entirely comprehended the situation.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Waldie, I fear you do not realize that more clean ideals of government sometimes exist among the so-called machine

politicians than among idealists who are ready to betray friends and violate the common principles of loyalty, integrity, and honesty to advance themselves. They are sincere, but egotism is not always efficiency, and leadership must be acquired. Graft, as we call it, can be controlled, but ignorant envy unchecked is hopeless," concluded Mrs. Daniels with a wave of her gloved hand.

"Politics, my dear, must be practical," broke in Bart, admiring the easy way in which Mrs. Daniels handled the awkward situation.

"And if women voted—" said Jane.

"We will vote when we become practical and ask for it, not as our rights alone—but because we are qualified. Our rights were settled in 1776, and that is why I am so interested in my work at Washington. I will call later, Mr. Waldie, for your letter," said Mrs. Daniels, arising to go.

"We shall be pleased to see you anytime," said Jane, going with her to the door with a conventional polite bow.

As Jane returned, her question to Bart was the natural interrogation, "Who is this Mrs. Daniels, Bart?"

"A friend of Senator Forthwith."

"I thought only men were politicians. It seems I was mistaken," said Jane.

"Women have entered all the fields of industry, my dear, and politics is not exempt," said Bart, with a smile.

The mail was brought in, and Bart busied himself looking it over hurriedly, and exclaimed:

"There, pet, don't worry. I love you enough to do almost anything you ask. I expect to be appointed a marshal. Yes, by George, here is the envelope; we will soon be in clover. Perhaps I shall be elected governor—who knows. Then you will be Mrs. Governor Waldie, eh?"

Elbert entered and inquired is there was anything new. "Here is a letter from Thompson, who wants you to attend to Simpkins' bill for carriages; it has been hanging over ever since the primaries," said Bart.

"Any letter for me, Bart?" inquired Jane.

"No, dear," said Bart, with an air of impatience. "McCutcheon says," continued Bart to Elbert, "that we must show ourselves at the opening of the A. B. C. Café on Madison Street;

take in Dooley's great show and wind up at the roof garden; then he has arranged for us to visit "Pink Jimmie" on North Clark Street, at ten o'clock, and at one o'clock, we are to meet at Madame Porteo's garden; she has a strong pull in the second precinct of her ward."

"Damn! I'm just getting sick and tired of this all-night, meet-me-in-the-dark work," exclaimed Elbert.

"When in Rome do as the Romans do," quoted Bart. "Learn the trade, my boy; you are my right-hand man; stick by your friends, and they'll stick by you. You see what I mean. Now, we must get to work. Let me see the schedule. Have the tabulation made; we must get out a full vote there—that's the precinct that always turns the trick. Most men are ready to sell their very souls for office, and call all the other fellows thieves and rascals. Rascality is a relative term, but look out for the man who talks much about rascals; he's likely to turn out the worst rascal of the bunch. We must win—*win*, boy, that's the word!"

There was a flash in the dark eyes as Bart raised his hand—a mannerism that his friends always insisted was as certain an omen as the flashing sabre of a dashing cavalry leader on a field of battle.

CHAPTER IX

ELBERT often recalled the proud hour when he was admitted to the bar. A lawyer recalls that event more often in his professional talk than his wedding day. Fate decreed that Elbert should have an office in the very building which he had helped to build in carrying bricks for Bart Waldie. He had dreamed of locating right there. It was one of those office buildings which house a greater number of people than inhabited the whole of Poplarville. His library at first consisted chiefly of government reports, blue books, and other flotsam and jetsam of dead literature so generously distributed by the government. As volume by volume was added to his law library, he studied them exhaustively and kept well posted on recent court decisions. His speeches at political conventions and caucuses throughout the city attracted attention in the newspapers, and he had become an invaluable and loyal lieutenant to Bart. He joined secret

and civic societies enthusiastically, and was voted a companionable fellow, but his social and political successes naturally excited more or less enmity among his young associates.

It was at this time he found himself in a position to enjoy his first visit with his mother at the old home. How proud he felt as the old friends of his childhood now referred to him as a Chicago lawyer; and he felt that his Charles Sumner side-whiskers added a particularly distinguished appearance of professional dignity.

"I always knew that boy would make his mark, by ginger," said Dr. Buzzer. "These other youngsters stayed at home tied to their mother's apron strings. Now just see the difference! When a boy has to jump the hurdles and hustle to begin with he lands somewhere forward usually."

During his visit home Elbert was retained in his capacity as a lawyer, much to his surprise. It came about in this manner. Ned Housle, the brother of his old sweetheart, had married Aletta Jackson, the only daughter of a wealthy farmer living near the village. Young Housle's

taste for city life promptly led him to locate in Chicago where he had squandered nearly all of his wife's money trying to establish himself on the Chicago Board of Trade. His natural instincts were those of the gambler, and now that his money was gone, the faithful wife went to Chicago to try and help him. Her reward was a suit for divorce, Housle thinking that to avoid publicity and trouble the deserted wife would allow the case to go by default—one of the usual alimony blackmail plots with the gender reversed.

Not so the irate father, who was a friend of Dr. Buzzer, and consulted that worthy practitioner.

"I'd never stand it, by ginger! That young scapegrace should be taught a lesson. I'd fight it," declared the doctor.

"Yes, but where's the money to hire one of those expensive city lawyers," said his friend plaintively. "Housle has already spent everything we've saved." And Dr. Buzzer thought of Elbert.

Before he returned to Chicago, where the case was to be tried, Elbert began systemati-

cally gathering all the evidence he could at Poplarville, and citations accumulated. Notes were made of important points and jotted down in the way common with lawyers who do not care to set forth plans too plainly for curious eyes. A leaf from his notebook appeared as follows:

"April 2—back door—hit club—Child
—Buzzer—Phys—Career—Chicago—
gamb—mist—Scrog—Shandy—good
char."

The day of the trial arrived, and the court room was filled with the usual large throng anticipating the disclosure of salacious scandals. The sensational newspapers reported it fully, and Bart handled the whole thing like a "coming out" party for his young lawyer protégé, and saw to it that the artists and reporters gave due prominence to the "bright young attorney for the defense."

The preliminary proceedings were completed, and although older lawyers opposed him, and Bart had offered to secure help, Elbert insisted on fighting the case alone. He struck from the panel of the jury such men as were thought to be unfavorable, under Bart's whispered direc-

tions. The wife and her father sat near Elbert, and the husband, flashily attired, defiant and unconcerned, across the table. The features of the trial were the frequent objections and exceptions by Elbert, his copious notes, and a few stern reprimands from the court. His cross-examination was so different from the usual stereotyped method that it rather non-plussed his opponents, and his witnesses gave such simple and brief testimony that it left Housle's attorneys little to work upon. The evidence had all been taken and it seemed a clear case for the defense, as public sympathy was naturally with the wife. The neighbors from Iowa had come, from the old home and had conclusively proven her character beyond reproach.

They had also established the brutality of the husband. To Elbert everything seemed serene for a verdict, and he was busily preparing for an eloquent final plea.

"We will call Peter Scroggins for further cross-examination," said one of Housle's attorneys.

This was a surprise to Elbert, as Scroggins had been one of his strongest witnesses.

"You swore, Mr. Scroggins, that you saw Housle strike the defendant at the rear door of their home on the morning of the second of April last."

"Yes, sir; I did."

"Now, sir, tell us what was the provocation of that blow."

"I object," shouted Elbert, suspecting a plot.

"She had just returned from a run-away trip with Bill Bozeman, to the county seat" Scroggins answered quickly.

There was a ripple of excitement in the court room over this sensational evidence. The judge was trying to quiet the crowd, while Peter, turning to the jury, continued:

"Bill Bozeman is dead now, but he was a tough one."

The little wife broke into tears and the father turned white and clenched his hands at this evidence of a plot to blacken the name of his daughter.

As no co-respondent had been named in the complaint, the testimony was stricken out, but it had been spoken and had poisoned the mind of the public as well as that of the jury. Elbert made an eloquent plea, but a verdict

was brought in for the plaintiff. It was evident that Scroggins had been held as a trump card.

"Elbert is so stuck up with city airs he don't know me down at his office. Guess he'll find out a country jay knows a thing or two after all," said Peter, defiantly, on leaving the room.

It was a shock to Elbert and his defeat was a keen disappointment, more especially because it was occasioned by a betrayal on the part of his own witness. The blindfolded justice as revealed in the jury system seemed to fall from the pedestal.

"It was a frame-up, Elbert," said Bart, who had come into the court room. "I'll see to this. Get a new trial, and we'll show them a trick or two yet."

The prosecution had not calculated upon a stubborn resistance, thinking the wife would meekly submit to avoid further scandal. Bart, in his determined way, approached Housle's attorneys when court adjourned.

"You fellows are going to get into trouble," he said. "I'm on to the whole deal. It was a dastardly trick."

They knew Bart Waldie; they also knew that he did not indulge in idle threats.

"Well, suppose we settle the case without costs and let matters stand as they are," suggested the elder attorney, feeling for a compromise.

"Not much! We'll fight this to the bitter end, and there's a red-hot poker waiting for you fellows if you try any more shyster tricks at the new trial," said Bart savagely.

The new trial was granted, and Housle's attorneys, fearing an explosion from Waldie searching for new evidence and with his argus-eyed forces upon them, made a mere pretense of a case, and the result was a vindication for the little country wife. Peter Scroggins had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER X

HIS spectacular defeat and final victory in the divorce case of Housle *vs.* Housle brought Elbert forward as one of the promising young lawyers of Chicago. Bart and his wife were naturally proud of him, and he continued to feel himself growing and developing in his chosen profession. Bart, too, continued to prosper in his business, but it was evident that in attaining his political aspirations, husband and wife were drifting apart. This was never indicated, however, by word or sign from Jane. Night missions and political conferences kept Bart away from home days and nights at a time, and Elbert was quick to notice it, but the most intimate friends find such matters too delicate to mention to one another. Besides, Bart had decided to nominate Elbert for the legislature.

Bart was in the midst of the campaign, and Elbert was spending an evening at their home when a note arrived from McCutcheon, and was

followed by that personage himself—a tall, angular, smooth-faced man who called himself a speculator.

“Got your note just now; I was arguing with Ainsworth here about our engagements this evening,” said Bart to McCutcheon as the latter was shown in.

“Young fellow,” said McCutcheon, turning to Elbert, “you couldn’t go to the legislature with a better boss—Boss Waldie—a boss means just what it means—a boss—I give it to you straight.”

“No,” said Elbert quietly, “Waldie is my friend, but I don’t believe he would say that he owns me; he is not my boss.”

“Bart, the young fellow feels his oats; the legislature seems too high for him yet,” said McCutcheon grimly.

“There, McCutcheon, that will do,” said Bart. “Ainsworth is all right; raised a little differently, that’s all.”

“I just dropped in for that check, you know,” said McCutcheon. “The salary list for the city hall; dead men’s row. Flip us your fist and I’ll be off.”

"We must cut down those dummies, Jimmy."

"Cut nothing; we need more recruits, Bart."

Jane entered just then. It annoyed Bart, but he introduced McCutcheon politely.

"Mrs. Waldie, Mr. McCutcheon."

"Good afternoon," she said, and then turning to Bart, "Bart, when will you be ready?"

"Well, ma'am, we've got a whole layout on the cloth for this evening. No telling when he'll get through," broke in McCutcheon, and Jane left the room in despair.

Bart was soon lost in earnest conversation with his ward manager.

"Schledgmilch is coming," said Bart. "Don't go, McCutcheon, till we see how his ward stands. Ah, here he is now."

Schledgmilch, a very fleshy, pompous man, entered the room puffing and wheezing.

"Goot afternoon, efferybody."

"How is the German snarl?" inquired Bart, pleasantly.

"Off color. No *Sherman* on de ticket and twenty good saloons in de ward. Vhat vay is dat to do beezness?"

"What do you hear about Turner?" asked Bart.

"Dat's it, dat's it, dynamite unt pepper crackers! Dat's de milk in the sheshnut. He has de evidence—I haf de tip. Five fellows vill swear ve are boodlers, vat?"

This rather startled Bart and McCutcheon, but Elbert, engaged with his papers, had apparently taken no notice of the conversation.

"You had it straight?" asked Bart.

"As straight as bossible ind dese crooked dimes," said Schledgmilch.

"Elbert, get the papers ready; I'll spike Turner's guns—the ingrate! He's in a glass house himself. Rush the case right through. We'll show old Turner's son that we can do the strap act as well as he can with his street cars. Young Turner's mouth must be stopped."

"Bart, is this justice, or—" interposed Elbert.

"Justice be damned! Fight fire with fire; that ward must be carried no matter what it costs. Turner's scalp if necessary," replied Bart heatedly.

"Yes, he's shelling out the money like corn, and some of our boys already wink the other eye," broke in McCutcheon.

"Stop Turner's money, put more on de payroll; do something for Schneider ent ve're all right, O. K., up-to-date, don't it?" said Schledgmilch, as if he had it all settled.

"Will five hundred fix matters?" said Bart.

"Beautiful! mit the goose out of sight—of Turner."

"Good! I'll meet you all at Hinsley's at eight sharp. Mac, stop in and tell Hinsley I want a private room for six and a small supper—bottle or two—now get."

"You vas a daisy!" called Schledgmilch over McCutcheon's shoulder as they retired.

"I'll remember the supers," echoed Bart, with a clinched fist as he turned to the unopened mail on his desk.

"Elbert, here it is, here's my appointment from Washington, signed and sealed. One minute an ingrate's rapier and then a grateful balm comes along."

Elbert took it up, read it. "Great, now you can pay off the old scores." And Bart soon regained the polished and manner that made his enemies tremble.

"Now go to the office at a half hour," said

Bart, looking at his watch. "Run down and see that something's in the papers tonight; just a line you know: 'The eminent Bart Waldie, the people's favorite, now U. S. Marshal, confidence in his integrity.' Say half a dozen lines, just something that will divert attention from this whisper stuff."

"It's late, but I'll try," said Elbert, leaving hurriedly.

Noting the absence of commotion, Jane crept back into the room.

"I'm glad they are gone," she said eagerly. "Am I going to have my husband five minutes to myself at last?" putting her arms around Bart's neck as he was seated at his desk looking over papers and schedules.

"There, there, Jane," he said, putting her off gently but firmly, "don't you see how busy I am, dear, and everything depends on what is done in the next few hours."

"Let us go for a drive, it will rest you."

"With all I have to do! Impossible! Have dinner sharp at six—I've got to be down town at eight. I can't be interrupted this way—I—" Jane was gone.

CHAPTER XI

NO sooner had Jane left the room than Bart began to feel a tinge of remorse over the manner in which he had answered her—for his ambition was to see Jane have all that other friends' wives possessed—everything in the latest style. He was proud of her accomplishments. As many other men have done in like circumstances—he tried to soothe his feelings at such times by unstinted generosity in making presents to her old friends at Poplarville.

As he sat at his desk he reflected: "It is pleasant to do a kind act; I love the dear old village and all its people. The life of those simple country homes and country people communing with nature, with a child-like trust, in the future, is what I hope to have, when I can leave this feverish, pushing, pulse-throbbing existence in the city. For what?" This question came often and oftener as he

reflected over events of yesterday and looked forward to the morrow.

His reverie was broken by the maid announcing:

"A foreign-looking woman insists on seeing you, sir. Mrs. Waldie is upstairs or I would call her."

"Show her in. Do not disturb Mrs. Waldie," said Bart, curtly. "Now who the devil can she be?" With thoughts intent on the political maneuvers that night, he awaited his caller. ¶

What was his surprise to see Nikita rush into the room announcing herself with a hiss, "It is me—Nikita."

"Well, what is it?" said Bart, recovering himself with a pretended yawn.

"Ah, what is it not, Naomi?"

"There, that will do; don't speak so loud—you promised never to come here again."

"Ah, that was before—"

"Before what?"

"The fraulein came from the village—the fraulein I say—not the frau."

"You can't get any more money out of me."

"No? Who win the love of fraulein; shall I say where? Bah!"

"Our affairs were closed two years ago."

"No!"

"The past is dead and buried."

"The sting dies not; my daughter, the frau, she live; her child, she live. The past not dead."

"Well, talk business."

"It is good, business is good—" said Nikita, sitting on the sofa.

The sentence was broken by Jane who appeared at the door.

"Why, Nikita, when did you leave Poplarville, and how are the folks; what are you doing in the city?" said Jane, all in a breath.

"Poplarville," uttered Bart, in a startled way.

"I don't know," responded Nikita, as she drew her hand across her face with a vacant stare.

"You are tired. A cup of tea will revive you. Bart, Nikita was an institution in Poplarville. She could do up skirts finer than I've ever had them done in the city. Wait, Nikita,

and I'll get you something to eat" she continued, leaving the room.

"Here," said Bart, taking advantage of the opportunity, "you are in the thirteenth ward. Go back to your work; here's \$20 for tonight; meet me at the old place."

"And Naomi and the child?"

"No matter about that; go before my wife returns."

"The fraulein—"

"I said my wife."

"It is final," said Nikita, with a nasal grunt.

"Tonight positive?"

"Yes, tonight. Here, I'll see you out. Keep your mouth closed."

When she had gone, Bart breathed more freely, and laughed with Jane over the call of her strange friend from Poplarville. "I gave her twenty dollars, glad to do it for you, my dear, and she went away happy." But he had hardly finished the explanation when the door bell rang, and Schledgmilch and McCutcheon were shown in. "You will excuse me now, my dear, I have important business with these men."

"Have you seen the evening paper, Bart?" shouted McCutcheon. "Let us congratulate you," said Schledgmilch, pitching his voice so it might be overheard by the disappearing Mrs. Waldie. "'Our distinguished Bart,' there it is," said Schledgmilch, showing him an article in a newspaper. "Now you go for Tony and blister him."

"Shake, pard; now you can give us the spots. The boys are all shaking over this boodle sensation," said McCutcheon, with a wink.

"You two have got nerve, haven't you?" said Bart. "Everything is working all right; there will be enough of a sensation over Tony's arrest to absorb the boodle shock. Elbert will pickle that tender tripe, and you two keep the boys in line and the affair will soon blow over."

"Like a zummer zephyr," wheezed the happy German, waving his red handkerchief.

"Oh, we are always ready to do the square thing," said McCutcheon, taking a seat.

"The ladies are coming, remember I'll do the talking and—" whispered Bart.

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"Mrs. Daniels, won't you sit down"" said Bart, gallantly, as she swept into the room with the air of ease and confidence that comes to habitual café habitués

Bart did not finish his sentence; it was Mrs. Daniels who swept in like a queen at court.

"I told you the nomination would be made; so glad," was her cordial greeting to Bart.

"Gentlemen, Mrs. Daniels of Washington," said Bart, introducing her.

"Get on to de swell outfit—Washington pays," said Schledgmilch to McCutcheon, under his breath.

"She knows her biz," responded McCutcheon. "Never stacked the cards, oh, no. Let's mosy, Gottlieb."

"We are sorry to expell ourselves, Mrs. Daniels," said McCutcheon, starting toward the door; "we just blew in to say to the boss, 'you do yourself proud—evenin'.' "

The two backed out of the room bowing, profusely, and when they were alone, Mrs. Daniels at once assumed a business-like air and opened the conversation directly to the point.

"Now, Mr. Waldie, I must take the midnight train for Washington; I was so in hopes of seeing Mr. Ainsworth before I left; but we seem to have missed each other all day."

"I am expecting him every minute."

"So glad; well, could you arrange for \$3,000 now?"

"Two thousand dollars, I thought?"

"Yes, \$2,000 and expenses."

"I will arrange tomorrow."

"That would hardly do. Make your check to bearer and endorse it. But there! I am telling you something you, of course, know yourself. You have doubtless given checks to bearer before," she said, with an arch and knowing look.

"Certainly; of course," responded Bart, rather nettled.

"By the way, Mr. Waldie, a fellow-passenger in the sleeper from New York—she was a lovely young creature—she moaned and tossed all night, crying, 'Bart, Bart, why did you desert me?' I wormed out of her that she thought she was married to a man years ago, but wasn't, you know—mock ceremony, and all that sort of thing, on the east side, some five years ago. But then, Bart is such a common name, you know."

"Yes, it is," responded Bart, calmly.

"Perhaps you'd better give me the check before I go."

"I think so."

"Senator Forthwith will use his influence for your new contract and we shall always be friends, of course."

"Of course," said Bart, writing out a check and handing it to her.

"Kindly present my regards to Mrs. Waldie," said Mrs. Daniels, coolly folding the check. "Oh, don't disturb her; good-night; many thanks."

As she started to go through the door she met Elbert. "Why, here is Mr. Ainsworth—I am delighted. You bashful man, to dodge me all day—well there—I will see you in Springfield next week unless you come to Washington," said Mrs. Daniels, as she swept out of the room.

"Whew!" said Bart, sinking into his chair. "Elbert is everything done in the Tony Turner case? Were the arrests made this morning?"

"Yes, he was arrested, secured bail, but the case will likely be put off for some time. Bart, I want to ask you, is this invoking the

law for personal revenge the right thing to do, even in retaliation?"

"My dear fellow, that is what the law is used for today by the self-righteous people who call themselves reformers. Justice is represented as a two-edged sword," said Bart, with a smile. "Tony Turner seeks to ruin us with that boodle charge. He is guilty of bribery. Now let him take his medicine for trying to bite the hands that fed him. He thinks his bribes a fortification. We'll show him. If all cases of personal revenge were prosecuted there would be fewer politicians at large. No, Turner invited this ruin upon himself when he joined the White Wings, but you will observe he still clings to his inherited swag, tainted as it may be, to support reform."

CHAPTER XII

THROUGH his political associations, Elbert met men who were directing extensive business operations, and liberal retainers from corporations made him feel the confidence of progress as far as income was concerned. And he felt that his horizon of life was widening with the experience of every day.

His clients found him a trustworthy adviser, and, having modified his "advanced" views of earlier life, a permanent practice seemed assured. Though he often felt the lash of the arbitrary power from some of the magnates newly rich, he did not permit his envy to overthrow his sense of justice and gratitude, for he realized that much of his good fortune came directly through the efforts of friends, and he was determined to be loyal and grateful not only as a matter of principle, but also as the best policy, knowing that hearty appreciation of favors is a reward no human being disdains.

There were now many journeys made for

clients who placed a liberal expense account at his disposal. Elbert had been on one of these business trips to the Pacific Coast, and while in the diner on the Overland Limited on the return journey he fell into conversation with a commercial man. Rotund, loud-laughing, companionable, and always ready with a joke or a story was this knight of the grip. He was thoroughly posted on current events and had an opinion on every subject discussed. Like most men he possessed a hobby, and in the course of acquaintanceship this hobby came to the surface.

"Have you ever read Bob Ingersoll?" he asked of Elbert.

"No, but I once heard him lecture."

"He was a wonderful orator, and a thinker and philosopher, too," responded the commercial man. "There's a man with a real mission. He helped to deliver humanity from the fetish of religious fanaticism and the haggling old hypocrites called preachers."

"Oh, I think you are too severe," Elbert demurred.

"Not at all. I've had enough of 'em."

"You ought to allow the rest of humanity some consolation. Life may be more or less of a delusion, but while I am not a church member, I have profound respect for the Bible."

"Respect! Stuff! That book is but a collection of myths," broke in the traveling man excitedly. "You know the light of reason dispels such a gorgeous nightmare, and only old women and idiots—"

"That's enough," said Elbert, warmly. "I have a mother and she has a religion, and when she taught me my prayers she taught me to love her and to respect her religion. Man, with all your reason, you've lost your heart. Give me the simple faith of my mother, and don't take from her the comfort of her faith. Man, haven't you a mother?"

"Oh, yes, but I am old enough to analyze these illusions and to look upon them without mawkish sentiment. Hypocrisy concealed in the guise of religion is repellent to any honest men."

"Honest? And yet you would deliberately annihilate your mother's religion! Come, old fellow, I don't want to quarrel; let's drop the subject."

In the heat of the discussion, which could be heard above the roar of the train, Elbert had not noticed the other occupants of the car. A young lady dressed in black, with large dark eyes, and attractive dimples, sitting opposite the two men, had listened attentively to the rather dramatic conversation and Elbert's eloquent plea for his mother's religion.

Allie Chatsworth was returning to the old home, where, a few weeks previous, her mother had passed away; Elbert's words fell upon sympathetic ears, and her eyes filled with tears as she thought of the mother who should never greet her again.

The traveling man retired, leaving Elbert to finish his meal in silence. As he was about to lay aside his napkin and pass out, the young lady in black spoke to Elbert as he reached out to secure his hat on the opposite side.

"Don't think me rude, sir. But I want to thank you for that beautiful tribute you paid your mother." And the little white oval face under the drooping black hat held the young man captive as she looked up at him.

"You are very kind" said Elbert, warmly and sympathetically, as he bowed, and the conversation continued naturally as they returned together to the Pullman.

At first he took his own seat and gazed out of the window. He tried to dream and read—anything to while away the dragging moments, but his eyes, unconsciously wandering over the top of the seat, caught a glimpse of two dark orbs looking invitingly his way. Finally, throwing off all sense of restraint, he approached her with the courtly, deferential manner that a woman instinctively accepts as due her sex.

"If you don't mind, I am going to talk with you again. These long rides are very tedious," he said.

"Perhaps you'll find talking with me more so," she said, with a shy glance, as she made a place for him on the opposite seat.

He leaned back with a sense of restfulness and peace, and started in to tell his life's history, giving it a heroic tinge. Without any real, defined purpose, he played upon mother-love, music, and a fanciful tale of disappointed and unrequited affection. He never worked harder on a case than he did in trying to prove to this

winsome girl that he was worthy of sympathetic admiration, even assuming the erratic methods of a genius to make his imaginary love-romance really interesting. As each chapter of his life story was unfolded, he found his fair listener growing prettier and more engaging and interesting. Her sympathetic responses, even though often merely monosyllables, meant far more to him than the favor of any judge or jury he had ever addressed.

"May I ask where you live? I hope I'm not too presumptuous," he finally asked her.

"Near Poplarville, Iowa."

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Elbert, "Poplarville! That's where I was born and where the scene of my life drama is staged. You kept me in ignorance all this time while I was spinning these yarns about people and places you probably know."

"I enjoyed every minute," she answered, with a frankness that startled him.

"I must candidly confess that there are bits of fancy in my story that would convict me of a rather active imagination if you knew all the truth."

"I'm not going to be severe with you, and I've met very few people from Poplarville, having been away at school for some years. Father moved there only recently. It seems so good to meet someone from near home," she said, with engaging candor in her eyes. Elbert continued his conversation, telling of his hopes, ambitions and ideals.

As they were about to part he was startled to notice on her bag the initials "Mrs. M. H."

Why had she not been frank? Was she married, he wondered. Well, she had been truly modest and an agreeable traveling companion, after all. Still it troubled him to think that she was married and had not told him.

"Are you—you—you—mar—or that is—have you a—a—umbrel—that is a—a—card? May I call and see you—that is—" mumbled Elbert, feeling himself growing red in the face.

"Certainly, here's my card. Do come and see us when you are at Poplarville," she said, with her sweetest smile.

He stopped and looked at the card. "Alice Chatsworth," he read aloud.

"Pretty name," he ventured.

"You like it?"

"Yes, that is—"

"Goodbye," she said, holding out her hand.

"Goodbye—good—can I be of any service? May I call?"

Elbert rushed out without waiting for an answer, poking his umbrella into grumbling passengers and hurrying as if someone were pursuing him. After he had gone some distance he stopped short and remarked to himself:

"Say, I'm a fool! Who is this young girl that she should make me act like a gibbering idiot? I'll go right back and just let her realize that I'm only a casual acquaintance."

He returned, but she had gone, and he looked in vain for her in the station.

"I must see her again to explain myself. What a sap-head she must think me," he reflected. Wounded vanity has lashed many a young gallant to suffering more poignant than unrequited affection. At that moment Cupid's coy glance was personified in the big dark eyes that had responded so eloquently to his over-land orations.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was a favorite plan of Elbert's to stake out an ambition in imaginary outlines, and then talk of it as an accomplished fact. Human nature, as it presented itself daily was his favorite study; in fact, he made an analysis of the temperament and hobbies of every acquaintance until he had them classified as accurately as though he had used a card index system. Similar impulses he conceived as belonging only to specific types leading to certain well-defined emotions. He was reading his sociological and psychological text-books from life.

There was one character that puzzled him and defied all of his established theories. His philosophic rules all seemed awry in one particular instance, for he could not fathom Allie Chatsworth. Was she a sweet little winsome girl, or was she a coquette, or why had she disdained to answer his letter? He began to lose interest and ambition in his work.

"I must see her and explain in person," he said one day to Mrs. Waldie, in whom he had confided.

"Are you thinking of paying her serious attentions?"

"No, I am not in love. I should just like to explain my actions—they make me appear so stupid."

"Go and see your mother, then; you owe her a visit," said Jane, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"I'm afraid Miss Chatsworth will think I have come especially to see her and then laugh at me more than ever, as one of her numerous victims."

"Nonsense. It is time you visited Poplarville, so that your old neighbors may take your measure as to the progress you are making."

"I'll go tonight," he declared.

The next morning Elbert walked up the old road shaded with poplars, to the corner, shaking hands with everyone he met. The old familiar names came instantly to mind. He felt himself a distinguished personage in the community, since he had won the Housle divorce

case, and by assuming a citified mien, sought to impress his old friends and associates that he was fairly started on the great work he had set out to accomplish.

"Knew you would do it; always said so," said Dr. Buzzer. "There's nothing like giving a young man a chance, by ginger," and the doctor blew his nose in the familiar old way as if to accentuate the remark to the group of admiring friends who had gathered about Jasper's cobbler shop to greet Elbert.

"It is good to be home again and breathe the pure air of Poplarville," said Elbert.

"Um! 'Pears to me you recollect the school ventilation; you don't walk just as you used to; you land more on your heel than on the sole of your foot," said Jasper, looking over his spectacles at Elbert, as he tapped vigorously at the sole of the shoe in his lap. "Now, Elbert, have you read Plutarch and—"

"Yes, old Hans Sachs of Nurnberg, Plutarch came before Blackstone—but my walk, Jasper—"

"It's the city pavement," responded the doctor, with a laugh.

"And a lawyer's consciousness of the uprightness of his profession," interposed the judge.

"Ah, suppose so; country fellow shuffles, city fellow pegs. I see Abner coming down the road and his weather boots not done. Put your foot up here and let me see. Just as I thought. Land o' Goshen, sole sound, but heels running over."

"It is good to see you, my boy," said the judge; "how do you like the city? You left us when quite young, hence your impressions should be vivid."

"Too much sewage and stuffiness, Judge, and not enough sweetness and light," returned Elbert.

It was in the balmy month of May and every flower and bush and song of the birds at the old home harmonized with Elbert's dreams of budding love, for there is something in the virgin fragrance of springtime that inspires a cheerful outlook. Elbert did not long remain at the shop or in the store. He would not even sit on the boxes outside and whittle notches, or stand by the bellows up the street while Sidney Forbes was shoeing horses. He was soon driv-

ing past the rich lands on each side of the typical Iowa highway to the Chatsworth farm. He was happy, and merrily whistled the tunes he used to whistle when a boy. Each one of the farms he remembered; this was the old Edwards' place; here was Beany Brown's lower farm; here Bobby Kenster's old stone house, now in ruins. As the farmers passed him on their way to the corners he recalled their names and titles in saluting them, although he had not spoken their names or thought of them in many years. The walnut grove, the old deserted stone quarry, the forbidden orchards, the plum thicket, where, in spite of warning trespass notices, the choice May apples were gathered on the banks of the creek, and the picnic grounds at Blue Branch Bayou all brought back happy memories of his boyhood, and he wondered why he had left them all for the whirling life of the city. Yet he felt well satisfied with himself that day.

Elbert inquired with some diffidence as to exactly where the Chatsworth farm was located. The white house, with its green shutters and foreground of foliage and pretty grove of

cedars, made an invariably picturesque scene among the prosaic prairie farms. On a little rise of rolling prairie flanked by a "wind-break" of poplars on one side, and an orchard on the other, the modest little farmhouse of the Chatsworth's nestled close to a large red barn with a new silo standing out like a castle tower. The front garden and veranda were scrupulously neat, and the front rooms had the appearance of not having been used except upon special occasions. As Elbert drove up to the house, a typical western farmer, with wiry red whiskers and a good-natured smile, and attired in overalls, gingham shirt and straw hat, came out to meet him with a suggestion of the hospitality of his Kentucky forebears of long ago.

"Is Miss Chatsworth at home?" inquired Elbert.

"I reckon so," said Squire Chatsworth, divining his mission naturally, as would a father with pretty daughters. "Won't you put up and come in?"

This rather relieved Elbert of his embarrassment, and the farmer called out, with a twinkle

in his eye, "Jim, better put up the team and give 'em a feed, as they are likely to—"

"Is Miss Chatsworth inside?" inquired Elbert, seeking to check further embarrassing comment.

"I reckon she's in the dairy looking after the butter, I'll call her."

Elbert was ushered into the dark parlor, which had the close air of disuse. The haircloth furniture, the mahogany whatnot, the marble-top centre table, the old Brussels carpet, the square piano upon which were piled portfolios of music, the embroidered motto, "God Bless Our Home," over the door, all indicated a typical farmer's home. These old-fashioned houses, suggestive of pioneer days, were soon to be revolutionized by the introduction of telephones, automobiles, and rural free mail delivery.

There was a movement at the door and a bright face and dancing eyes appeared. He arose hurriedly.

"Ah!" he said.

"Oh!" echoed a voice that seemed to harmonize with the face and eyes.

"I thought it was Miss Chatsworth," he remarked with surprise.

"No, I am just her sister. Allie is not at home; she will return soon, though. Won't you sit down?" said the owner of the bright eyes, motioning him to the chair from which he had risen.

"Thank you; if you don't mind I will wait," said Elbert, settling back rather shyly and nearly tipping over the rocker.

"Are—you Mr.—Mr.—of Chicago?"

"Ainsworth. Ainsworth of Chicago."

"Oh, yes; Allie has spoken of you so often, and she will be delighted to see you. Just now I am busy in the dairy. Will you excuse me a minute?"

She returned a few moments later and found Elbert studying a large crayon portrait over the piano.

"That is mamma. We don't use this room much since she left us," she said. "Veo is my name," she continued. "They call Allie, Miss Chatsworth; she's older than I am." And the eyes so much like her sister's looked up at him innocently.

Allie Chatsworth did not arrive until late,

but time had flown for the young sister and the unexpected visitor. She was very much surprised to see Elbert and appeared embarrassed, but with a woman's tact she tried to be entertaining. At last she confessed with coquettish embarrassment that she was to "have other company" that evening.

"I am sorry, Mr. Ainsworth; I want to see you so much. You remain a day or so, don't you?"

"Yes, do," broke in Veo, in her girlish way. "We can have a good time, and you can enjoy a real country vacation."

He was vexed and yet who could be blamed? He caught a glimpse of Veo's bright little smile and muttered more than uttered:

"I am staying a few days with mother, and I will be delighted to call again."

"O, I am so glad," exclaimed Veo. "But come, before you go, let's go down and see the flowers."

Veo related to Elbert her experience at a distant seminary. "Papa would like me to be accomplished, but I love the dear old farm best. I am so sorry Allie couldn't see you tonight. You must be disappointed."

It was an earnest expression of sympathy, but it made Elbert wince. His pride was touched.

"Isn't it beautiful here?" he said; "the flowers, the birds, and the old trees at home seem like dear old friends."

"Why aren't you a farmer, then?" she asked with charming frankness.

"We don't have farms in Chicago."

"That's right," she answered, with a twinkle of humor in her eyes. "But don't forget to come again to see us, will you?"

He called at the Chatsworth house the next day, and spent it playing and singing at the piano, and inspecting the likenesses of all the relatives near and distant in the well-worn plush photograph album.

In taking his departure, Veo and Allie were the joint hostesses who wished him to come again, but his last look was for little Veo. His first ideal had passed. Pygmalion had spoken, but the living Galatea was not what he had pictured in his love dream. She was only the messenger.

"I'm muddled," he mused, as he drove home

between the willow hedges and over rickety plank culverts.

Elbert's stay at Poplarville was prolonged for a week, and his frequent drives into the country occasioned more or less gossip in the village. He was almost a daily caller at the Chatsworth farm, and the old farmer was quite favorably impressed with the "city chap." "He holds on to his common sense with his new style collars, and he'll probably make a match with Allie," was his reflection.

Parents are usually blind to the real trend of love affairs, for it was little Veo who held Elbert captive. She gave him unconsciously that trusting confidence and friendship which the average man most covets.

"Veo, we never seem to get through talking to each other," said Elbert on the day before leaving. They had wandered down the lane near the old tree at the corner.

"I know it. Oh, and I've had just a happy time since you came. But then you came to see—to—see Allie."

"Yes, and—I found you."

They were sitting on the rustic seat under the

old oak. The deepened twilight had crept upon them, and the plaintive note of a thrush intermittently broke the stillness.

Her dark liquid eyes stirred him with the expression of a kindred soul in their sincerity. But her cheek paled and her eyes dropped under his gaze.

"Since mamma died I have had no one to talk to—just like you," she said.

He moved closer, and she looked up at him again with that deep, soulful glance, and impulsively he placed his hands on her shoulders, looking deep into her eyes.

"Veio, do you know what love means?"

She did not answer, but bowed her head still lower, refusing to meet his eyes.

"Veio, Veio," he whispered. He clasped her hands in his and drew her toward him. She seemed powerless to resist, and slowly crept into his arms like a tired child. Bending over her, he tilted the dimpled chin, and looked deep into those eyes which spoke the truth that her honest heart could not conceal.

"Veio, Veio, I love you," he repeated softly, in tones that vibrated with suppressed emotion.

It was love's sweet cadence, and even those words need not have been spoken, so perfect was their understanding.

"And I love you, Elbert," she whispered.

For some minutes they sat looking deep into each other's eyes, and the first kiss sealed a soul communion—a welding of the destiny of two lives.

"Veo, my own love!—my dear."

"Oh, how happy mamma would have been to know you, Elbert. Let me pray with you, dear, I'm so happy. I know now what love means."

She turned her eyes toward the starry vault above, her arm still clinging around Elbert's neck. Her long black hair had fallen down over her shoulders, and again she turned to him in that simple, trusting way.

"Elbert, can you always love just a little girl like me?"

"Always, my little Veo," he said, drawing her to him again.

"Then you'll promise always to love God, who was so good to a motherless girl; I know you will, because He has been so kind to me."

They sat enveloped in a halo of Love, and even the calling of the frogs in the pond nearby seemed sweet music to their ears. They had each other—the world was no larger than their two souls. To Elbert it was the supreme moment of his life, for he felt the thrill of possession, linked with a new and compellingly sweet responsibility.

“Veo, all my own Veo!” he said, with a thrill in his voice.

“Yes, Elbert, all yours, forever and ever.”

“Little girl, you do not know all the wickedness of the world and of men. God, make me good to you always. Are you willing to leave the dear old farm and fight life’s battle with me?”

“Anywhere, Elbert. My life and future belong to you. Mamma has blessed her little girl.”

The tears which fell from those earnest loving eyes were like a gentle baptism from heaven. Hardly knowing, it Elbert had drifted into life’s safest moorings. He was happy and fortified with the love of little Veo, nothing seemed to him impossible of achievement.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was all like a dream to Elbert as he drove back to Poplarville that evening. He told his mother of his engagement before leaving for Chicago, and she asked him one question:

“Has she all your heart—unreserved, Elbert?”

“Yes, mother, quite sure. She has my very soul in her keeping. Veo is my ideal. She is like you, mother. She believes in me alone. I feel a nobler man for having won such a love, and you will be a mother to her, I know, and make her happy, and she will be a real daughter to you, for she craves a mother’s love.”

There are times when a mother’s “Good-bye, son, and God bless you,” means the yielding into another woman’s keeping the fate of her boy. All her years of tender devotion seemingly find their culmination at the marriage altar.

Elbert returned to his work in Chicago on the next train, and immediately visited the

Waldie's, and related his glad tidings. They were greatly pleased at his happiness.

"You are sure you could suffer for her, Elbert?" asked Jane.

"Why are you women so skeptical? The language of the heart speaks plainer than words."

"So, that's where you've been all this time, is it?" broke in Bart, looking up from his paper. "Well, we all catch this love fever at one time or another, and happy is the man who comes through it all right. But they have been raising the deuce with our organization since you left, and I'm just now mapping out plans for a fall campaign."

"What seems to be the matter?" asked Elbert.

"Well, you know political success is not gained without making enemies. Your acceptance of that corporation fee for that western trip has made it impossible for you to be a candidate as we planned."

"What has that to do with it? It was legitimate and legal," Elbert replied.

"Yes," continued Bart, with a shrug, and

running his fingers through his wavy hair, "they say you are a boodler with the rest of us."

The opposition papers the next morning charged Bart with being a fit candidate for state's prison. Bart was always prepared for emergencies, and through friendly papers, retaliated with the old charge of bribery against Tony Turner, the son of a wealthy street railway magnate. Tony had made himself particularly obnoxious by heavy contributions to the campaign funds of the opposing party. In fact, it was said that if Bart could kill Tony off, that would cut off the sinews of war for the opposition. Bart was not particularly obnoxious to those with whom he was politically identified. There was just enough truth in the charge of the bribery to silence his alleged supporters, and his former friends grew cold, one by one.

Turner was now a bitter opponent of Bart Waldie, having defeated him in securing several large contracts by financially backing the rival bidders, determined to get even "if it takes every penny of Dad's pile," which was pronounced as a slogan for the new reformer.

The newspapers which had opened the boodle and bribery fight in glaring headlines, dared not drop it now for fear of public opinion insisting that Turner's money had silenced them. Bart had turned the guns on his opponents. The agitation grew into a fever of public indignation, and even the judge who granted young Turner a moderate bail was censured. The public was aroused and seemed to want to wreak vengeance on Tom Turner's son.

The lawyers with political ambitions feared to accept a retainer in the case for the defense, and yet it was a case that required a semi-political lawyer. Turner was seen in Elbert's office, and this at once aroused the suspicion of gossips.

"Ainsworth, I come to you to take this case. I am innocent."

"Why Turner, there are other older lawyers who can serve you better, and for personal reasons, I ought not to take the case," said Elbert firmly.

"But why?"

"To be perfectly frank, it would make a breach with Bart Waldie, the best friend I ever had, besides—"

"But this is a case of justice, not of politics," pleaded Turner.

"Yes, but you know politics creeps into a little of everything nowadays. It may be well disguised, but it is there."

"Ainsworth, your fee would be more than—"

"Stop! I'm not to be bought. No amount of money would tempt me."

"Yes, but these libels are killing me—a victim of blackmailers and political plotters. I would not care for myself, but my mother has been ailing—and—well—it's killing her too."

"Well, let me think it over; I want to do the right thing," said Elbert, going to the door.

After Turner had left, Elbert wrote to Veo, telling her all the facts of the case. Early the next morning he received a telegram:

Dear Elbert;—Defend him by all means if you believe him innocent. Your Veo.

"I'll go and see Jane Waldie about it, too," he decided, and the next moment had swung onto a car for the suburbs.

"Elbert, this political life is killing poor Bart,"

said Mrs. Waldie, pointing to Bart asleep on the lounge, as Elbert entered the room.

"I know it, and it is killing us all. Now, listen:

Elbert related his dilemma in the Turner case, also showing Jane the telegram from Veo. She reflected a moment, and then arose, with that proud flash in her deep blue eyes that he remembered so well.

"You must decide that for yourself, Elbert."

"It will make trouble between Bart and me."

"I'm sorry," she answered sadly. "But if you believe that young man is innocent, defend him. That is clearly your duty."

"Supposing Bart—" remonstrated Elbert.

"Trust Bart's generosity. Even if it does create a breach, better that than personal and professional dishonor."

The announcement of his final decision was delayed several days, owing to a crisis in the local political situation which kept Elbert away from his office. Turner naturally concluded that Elbert's absence was merely an evasion to indicate a negative answer, and was greatly discouraged.



There was a ripple of excitement in the court room over this sensational evidence. The judge was trying to quiet the crowd, while Peter, turning to the jury, continued, "Bill Eozeman is dead now, but he was a tough one." The little wife broke into tears, and the father turned white and clenched his hands at this evidence of a plot to blacken the name of his daughter

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Bart Waldie had been busy night and day following the debates necessary to "carry" the primaries for his candidates. A spasmodic wave of reform worried the machine manipulators, but the reformers were disorganized and lacked the bond of personal interest and hope of office or reward which animated the cohorts of Boss Bart. Waldie had been busy visiting all of the critical wards in the city during the day, and he found his instinct even keener than ever to detect the weak points along the firing line. He felt that victory was already assured.

"Elbert, you must see to that ward of Hunky-Dorey. Cacklin will have to be renominated for alderman to get him out of Jenkin's way for sheriff."

"Shall I plan for a meeting?"

"No, try to steer Cacklin. He thinks he is an orator. Cultivate him and he is good for a thousand in the fall campaign fund."

A glimpse into the abuse of the old-time caucus methods then in vogue had discouraged Elbert thoroughly from deciding upon a political career, but now the primaries were making it possible for unknown and untried men to

slip by, if provided with money for an "educational campaign," and with a cause that could be called "the people." Just who "the people" were was not necessary to define in the heat of a campaign. Alderman Cacklin and other distinguished machine men had looked to Bart for leadership and advice, and they kept the barroom reserves ready to carry a caucus at a moment's notice. The crowd would simply rush into the place where the caucus was to be held, shouting for their own chairman, and when he was elected he in turn recognized his own men and motions. All this was considered legal because it was the will of the majority. The influence of the rougher element was positive while that of the better class was negative.

An attempt had been made by a number of so-called "good citizens" in Cacklin's ward to hold a caucus, and Hunkey-Dorey, the renowned philosopher, had just completed the work of routing them and securing Cacklin's nomination as alderman. Hunkey-Dorey stood on a billiard-table in Cacklin's saloon orating in all his glory, in his own peculiar way, punctuating every climax with a call to liquid

refreshments. The room was dense with tobacco smoke, and very convenient to Cacklin's office in the rear. The newly-nominated alderman was escorted in by a committee, and after a polite bow, read a statement prepared for him, and the crowd applauded every time he stopped for breath. He said:

"Fellow-citizens: Like my illustrious colleague, Dave, I am a good citizen. I wish to say that I am proud that I am a good citizen. There hasn't been a scrap in this ward today. No policeman has been called into this convention except to get a cigar. I do not wish to be misunderstood, so I here and now state my platform in words of no uncertain tone. My object, if I am again elected, shall be to repeal the law prohibiting saloons from remaining open all night. I believe in base-hits and competition. Thank you. Will you join me?"

The reserves were not long in joining—in fact, the "joining" was the most popular and spirited incident of the proceedings.

That night Bart and Elbert were talking over the events of the day with a feeling that the old caucus system must go.

"This is the last time we are going through with this kind of work, my boy. You've been true blue and will not be forgotten."

"Bart, I feel as if it were all wrong."

"Well, we have this material in the sovereign voter—some party will utilize it, and why should not we as well as the other fellows? Our crowd is the only portion of the American people who can be depended upon to attend the caucus and vote together. The cultured and religious elements do not value the right to vote, but the poor men who want a dollar or a job make the most of their little privilege. That makes them reliable, the most reliable element in elections."

"Yes, but I'm through with it now."

"You stay by your friends and you're all right. We'll get some juicy plums out of this deal. I want you to go to Congress, Elbert, some day. You will be an honor to us."

"It is not unpleasant to contemplate."

"It is a sure thing. You've been too loyal to all your friends not to have your reward. Political success grows like everything else. There are some ugly political complications just now—but then, we'll talk it over tomorrow."

CHAPTER XV

AS Elbert sat on the edge of his bed reflecting, while untying his shoestring the following night, he felt that a storm was brewing for the morrow. The longed-for decision to appear as his attorney was given to Tony Turner, whom he found awaiting him at his office. The young man all but hugged Elbert in his joy, and he spent the whole day going into details, which were clear to him, knowing what he did of the causes that led up to the arrest. Veo had arrived that afternoon to visit with Jane, and Elbert was anxious to leave the office early. They were preparing for a cosy little betrothal dinner. He sincerely hoped the question of the Turner trial would not come up between Bart and himself. But he was not so fortunate, for the Turner trial was the liveliest political topic of the hour.

“Well, old man, we will have that young monkey of a Turner pickled this time sure, and then we will have smooth sailing. It’s

all fixed; you are to steer for the congressional nomination, and if you get it, you are certain of an election, no matter what happens," said Bart, handing the cigars to Elbert for a quiet smoke and talk.

"Bart, I am going to defend Turner," said Elbert.

"Defend what? Are you crazy? What are you talking about?" exploded Bart, arising excitedly, and coming toward him.

"I have accepted a retainer to defend Turner, and—"

"Elbert, my God! You haven't sold out! Say that you are joking," said Bart, with eyes flashing.

"I must defend Turner," responded Elbert firmly.

"What, what, defend my worst enemy? Are you crazy, or mad, or what?"

"None of these. I am simply doing what appears to me to be right and just under the circumstances."

"Why, boy! Right? Right? You would not be a traitor, and knife me at this critical moment? You, my boy—well—I've met these

situations before—and you must look out now—it don't pay to turn yellow."

"Bart, listen; there is a reason."

"Reason be damned; what reason can excuse your treachery? You know Bart Waldie can be a foe as well as a friend."

"Bart, don't lose your head—you have been as a father to me. In defending Turner I am simply doing my duty as an attorney, and can help to right the wrong done him and save you from what might follow."

"Don't talk like a fool; there's some other reason; what is it?" hissed Bart.

At this moment Veo and Jane came into the room, having heard the stormy words between the two men.

"Yes, Mr. Waldie, there is another reason. Tony Turner is my cousin," said Veo, coming toward him.

"Oh, that's it?" sneered Bart. "And you are not ashamed to listen to silly women who know nothing of the affairs of the world; how much money did you get?"

"Bart, you are going too far," said his wife; "Elbert has served you faithfully. He thinks

it is his duty as an attorney to appear for Tony."

"Stop there; I am master in this house and I don't wish to hear another word. As for you, sir, you will find other quarters at once; no traitors in my camp. The bribe you got from Turner will pay the wedding expenses."

"Bart Waldie, be careful!" said Elbert, starting toward him.

Veo screamed, but Jane placed herself between the enraged men.

"Now get out; I will teach you a lesson that you will never forget," said Bart hotly. "I stay by my friends through thick and thin, but my enemies I crush."

"Come, let us be men," implored Elbert.

"Go," roared Bart furiously.

"Bart," interposed Jane.

"You, too, if you say another word in defense of the young viper," he said, turning to her savagely.

Elbert led the two women from the room, without a glance toward his former friend.

When alone, Bart sat for some time as if stunned. "Elbert turned against me," he

repeated over and over again. "Well, pull together, old Bart, there's another good battle or two left in you."

Veo cut short her visit and returned home that night. Elbert plunged into the work connected with the trial with a feeling that he was in the right, although realizing that it blasted his political prospects, but most of all he mourned the breach with Bart, whom he had grown to love as a father and he determined to save Bart from himself. The trial was one of the "spectaculars" during that term, and the efforts made by Elbert and his assistant counsel seemed almost superhuman. They found an obstacle at every turn. Bart still held the trenches. They had unearthed a large amount of unexpected evidence and efficacious law points. The beginning of the trial was unfavorable to Turner, but the very oddity and unexpectedness of every play on the legal chess board by Elbert confused the prosecution. The state's attorneys in their blind semi-political vindictiveness neglected to recognize the reaction of popular opinion, and then Elbert became a popular hero, be-

cause of the bitter attacks made upon him by the "machine," and he was hailed as an honest man and leader to be trusted by the people.

"I am here a poor man's son, to plead for the rich man's son," were the opening words of his remarkable plea. He reviewed carefully the testimony of the state's witnesses, showing that it was colored with malice and concluded with a simple but sincere plea for justice and toleration, insisting that fairness and not prejudice should prompt verdicts in court if not in elections.

Young Turner sat nearby, pale from past dissipation and present worry, feeling deeply the degradation in having his mother's name dragged into criminal court, for her testimony had been a trump-card, and proved how she had been haunted by blackmailers since her husband's death. Elbert attempted to shield none of his client's faults, and his earnest and candid statement as to his own personal connection with the case was thrilling. He was an orator who could move men and he talked to each individual in the jury as to a friend. The twelve men had been carefully studied by

him, and in reality he made twelve separate pleas. Playing upon the twelve individuals as upon so many strings of a harp, the effect was magical.

"I am right—God knows I am right, and God knows what this has cost me, but Justice toward all men and malice toward none should triumph day after day in our courts." His closing words were spoken with an earnestness that paraphrased Lincoln's immortal utterance, and his auditors were thrilled. The jury retired and were out twenty-four hours without reaching a verdict. This was a surprise, as many believed that a verdict of guilty would be quickly reached, and there were dark hints as to Turner's money "hanging the jury."

The verdict was announced the following afternoon, when young Turner and his mother had returned to the court room after a night of terrible suspense.

"Not guilty," spoke the foreman of the jury in solemn tones.

For Elbert it was a great professional triumph—but how empty was triumph now, when he could not put his arms about dear old Bart and

hear him say, "Good boy." It stung him to the quick to be looked upon as an ingrate.

A fee of five thousand dollars was paid to him, which had been well earned, and yet what was that to compensate for blasted political hopes, and Bart Waldie's friendship, which, after coming in contact with the hypocrisy and cant of Bart's enemies during the trial, seemed like a rare jewel. Bart's heart was a rough diamond—but how genuine it seemed compared with the sham of his enemies. Many of his old clients deserted him, but he still felt that he was in the right. A little square envelope brought him a message that repaid him for all:

My own dear Elbert:—You noble boy—all for me you have freed poor Cousin Tony; but I knew he was innocent. What a relief to his mother. Oh, my noble knight; how your little Veo loves you! I always keep the shield of your love bright and shining, like Elaine, but you will not leave me like Lancelot, will you, my own darling Elbert? I am so happy and proud of you, my own Sir Knight.

Your own Veo.

"That settles it," reflected Elbert, smiling tenderly. "We'll be married while this fee lasts, and not take chances on another." And he wrote and asked her to set an early date for their wedding.

CHAPTER XVI

A WEDDING in Poplarville was an epoch-making event. There were new dresses to be provided, and Elder Freeman was to have a new frock coat. Dr. Buzzer had the first new beaver hat in twenty years, and Jasper worked far into the night mending shoes, while Plutarch's "Lives" lay on the shelf, neglected. In the Chatsworth neighborhood the wedding of Veo and her "city fellow" was looked forward to as the pre-eminent social function of the year, from which all others should be dated. The preparations were very elaborate, and everybody was invited. Allie, the older sister, had been married since Elbert's first visit, but her wedding did not attract general interest in the neighborhood, as she had been absent so much of recent years that she had drifted away from the intimate personal acquaintance of the neighbors. But little Veo was endeared to all, because in spite of her seminary culture, she still loved the farm and

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never asked for any other distinction than that of being a farmer's daughter. She had been the favorite of her mother, and her simple and sympathetic nature endeared her to all who knew her. The women of the neighborhood all joined in contributing to the wedding feast, which was to be such an one as only farmers' wives could provide.

Elbert arrived a few days prior to the wedding and found Veo very busy and very happy.

"Oh, Elbert, I am so glad you've come. Now you can help me plan. There's ice cream and fruit and pressed chicken to be looked after, and I want everything all right for you, dear. You are my whole life. Oh, I hope you'll always think of our wedding day—with happy memories. And think of it, Elbert, we're making memories right now."

"Little one, why all this fuss for me? It's your wedding day."

"Elbert, a girl loves to have a big wedding when she has such a dear, noble husband as you are; I want all the neighbors to see you; I am not selfish, and you like it, don't you, dear?"

"Yes, little Bright Eyes, bring on all the

neighbors, cousins, and aunts; I am ready to face them all with you."

* * *

They were leisurely walking down the old familiar lane to the corners, and Elbert was trying to find new phrases to express his affection, and *eternal* was the only word that seemed adequate.

"I would face anything with you, too," was the simple response sincerely spoken, which elicited another kiss.

"Let me have you five minutes all to myself before the ceremony. You have been gone so long, but now we will never be parted."

"Little girl, are you happy in leaving the old farm for the city?"

"Anywhere, everywhere, Elbert, with you."

"You dear inspiration! Just, think, Veo, this is the same spot where we were betrothed a year ago."

"And I do believe that is the same thrush that made her nest here then."

"And the same catbird that called to us, 'I see you'."

"Every day I have come here while you were away in the city."

Abner Tomer passed by just then and called to Veo.

"Your father's looking for you, Veo; heaps of things to do before sundown, if you're making to get hitched. How'dy, Elbert?"

"How are you, Deacon Tomer? Hope the church has been flourishing," said Elbert, good-naturedly.

"Nothin', nothin' out of common. There's talk of one of them electric railroads through our village, so'm told; never want to see one of the darned things; they run on iron."

"This is an age of machinery, Deacon," said Elbert.

"This may be an age of machinery," said Abner, "but I'll be darned if I want to be buried by machinery. 'Pears to me your collar's kind of stiff, too—ironed by machinery, so'm told. Paper ones are good enough for me."

With this declaration he shuffled off up the lane, whipping the weeds with his cane.

"What are you doing there, pet?" asked Elbert, turning to Veo.

"Oh, only my daily crumbs for the birds," she said, as she scattered a handful and the

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"Child, come in and get a shawl to put around you, and then run in while I finish getting out the baking."

Veo gave a longing look at Elbert as she passed to go into the house. For a while all was confusion in the final preparations for the wedding.

"My stars alive! But you folks is the dawdlest parcel of people in seven corners. Sundown here—folks a-comin', the elder in sight and nuthin' done. Simon, put that vine around the other way," fairly screamed Minnie Mary to those at work.

"Let me help, Minnie Mary," said Shandy, as he started to go off with a pie.

"Put down that pie, Shandy; if it gets into your hands no one else will get a taste of it. That's choice,—filled with gooseberries."

It was in the early autumn, and it was Veo's fancy to be married under the old tree where their love message had been spoken, and at the same hour of the evening.

"To me, it is a sacred spot, Elbert, and it always brings back such happy memories," she urged, when the choice was settled upon.

The ceremony was to occur at twilight in God's own temple to the music of rustling leaves.

The local Methodist minister, Dr. Freeman, a tall spare man with long beard and smooth upper lip, arrived with his family of ten. Later the neighbors came driving in from all directions. The horses were "put up" and began munching their oats, while everyone prepared for a good time at Veo's wedding. There were many country boys and girls there who had never been at a real wedding, and the young men who had been at the county seat more frequently tried to be impressively at ease and important.

At the "appointed hour," as the papers record, the bridal couple came downstairs: Elbert stately and handsome, but nervous, and Veo, blushing and more beautiful than ever, reaching up to her lover's arm, a picture in her radiant happiness.

As they passed by the parlor door the bridal chorus from "Lohengrin" was played on the piano at double-quick tempo, with a suggestion of Wagner in the chords, by reason of the piano

being out of tune. The guests remained in the parlor and standing outside in groups, until the bridal party had passed out, and then joined the procession and formed a semi-circle about the bridal bower. The soft twilight gave the scene a weird and alluring aspect, and even Nature mingled congratulations, as scarcely had the words been spoken pronouncing ~~the~~ two husband and wife when a shower of autumn leaves fell upon them as a benediction. The elder, in his homely prayer, referred to "the sainted mother in heaven," and many eyes moistened as they sang the doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and that seemed to clear the atmosphere. Then Elder Freeman proclaimed proudly, "Now let me introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Ainsworth; Elbert, allow me to congratulate you; and Veo, well—I've got to set the fashion," and he kissed her heartily.

After Farmer Chatsworth came Jasper and the doctor, as they struggled to speak the words of congratulation.

"Now, folks, come right in," said Minnie Mary, grand marshal of the day, "the victuals

are getting cold. Elder, lead the way there. Melancthon, you wait until the children are helped. Here, the bride next—that's right, no, go right in; there's room for all."

A young man from the city had gallantly kissed the bride and wished her joy, but the blushing country boys only shook hands and mumbled, "How are ye? Wish ye joy!" scarcely daring to look at Veo, whom their honest hearts worshipped as a queen.

We love to linger over these happy memories of simple, rural weddings. The feast and music by Van Zipper's band of real old-fashioned fiddlers, who all could play and call off a quadrille, or officiate as auctioneer at a "sale" with equal facility, soon loosened the reserve of the country boys and girls, who at first looked upon Elbert as something of a usurper. After the guests had departed, Elbert and Veo were officially invited to inspect the array of wedding presents. There were quilts and pillow-shams, plush albums, splashers, knives, forks and spoons, and a formidable array of perfumery bottles, innumerable trinkets and useful articles for housekeeping that indicated the prac-

tical thought of farmer folks. The guests drove home in the glorious moonlight and began to talk crops and stock once more.

"Are there as good people anywhere else, Elbert? I love them all, and they love you, my true knight, you are their hero—my hero," said Veo, proudly.

Before going into the house, they wandered over to the wedding bower. The candles in the Chinese lanterns were flickering.

"Here, Elbert, I gave my life to you," said Veo.

"Little one, you are now all my own," and he drew her to him and again looked into her lustrous eyes, repeating softly, in recalling memories of their happy trysting place, "Oh, Veo, Veo."

The whispering winds through the gently-swaying sprays and leafage of the trees seemed to echo his words again and again.

CHAPTER XVII

WEDDING journeys and honeymoons are events in family history that always possess an afterglow of romance.

The young couple went directly to Chicago without even a thought of Niagara Falls or Washington. Elbert resolved to build up a law practice of his own, and foresaw a period that called for strict economy. A cosy flat had been chosen, and Mrs. Waldie, who determined to continue the friendship for Elbert, in spite of the breach with Bart, was already there to welcome them and assist the young wife in fitting up the little home. She hoped in some way to bring about a reconciliation in this very place, when time had lessened Bart's sense of injury. With Mrs. Waldie to help her, Veo found the keenest delight in "settling" the new home. She had very few lonesome moments, and felt a sense of guilt at not feeling more twinges of homesickness.

With Elbert, things had not gone so well in

a business way as he had hoped. Pushing aside his coffee after breakfast one morning he said, "Veo, I feel the need of doing something—there's absolutely no business, and—"

"Why, Elbert, what are you talking about? We'll do without a honeymoon, and just save," said Veo, assuming a matronly air.

"I thought that we had better take our wedding journey now while I have the money, or we may never have it," said Elbert, getting up to kiss her with the devotion of honeymoon days. "We'll attend the travel school, and I'm sure that I shall return much better fitted for my work. Besides, this quarrel with Bart is heart-rending. I can start better if people have a chance to forget it."

"A real honeymoon trip! Oh, won't that be fine!" exulted Veo, looking up admiringly at her stalwart young husband. That night Elbert brought home a pocket full of timetables, and they had a merry time making plans for the trip.

Mrs. Waldie, learning their plans, insisted that they should make one more effort for reconciliation with Bart before they left, and

they accepted the invitation to her home with misgivings. Bart was not at home when they arrived, but he came in later. Evidently he had been on the caucus skirmish line, for his face was deeply flushed. At sight of Elbert, it darkened with a scowl.

"Jane," he said, "why do you permit this? Have you no pride, or no respect for my wishes?"

Quickly Veo reached over and took his hand.

"Beg pardon, but—but—you don't know about this, you cannot understand—my whole life has been ruined by ingratitude—"mumbled Bart, as he hastily withdrew his hand and stalked away.

When they reached home, Veo exclaimed: "Oh, what a pity, Elbert."

"Yes, Veo, it is a sad state of affairs. God knows I wish we could bridge the chasm."

"Sometimes I think I am to blame—"

"Pet, it's all right. Don't let such foolish notions bother your little head," he replied, kissing the black curls that clustered on her forehead.

Matters had been growing more desperate

with Bart Waldie since the estrangement with Elbert. The young lieutenant had become indispensable to him and figured prominently in every plan he had made for the future. He had begun to lean upon Elbert, and now, with that support gone, the downfall of "Boss Bart" was freely predicted, bringing with political disaster the wreck of his business and of his health. His enemies were in high glee.

For days at a time Bart remained away from home, and the house seemed like a tomb, so silent it was. Dark and dreary were the long days to Jane. With no heart for society, and with no inclination to seek pleasure, she even welcomed the visit of Nikita Cracovitz, who was shown in just then from the kitchen.

"Herr Waldie is not sick,—perhaps?"

"No, Nikita, Mr. Waldie is quite well."

"Ah, not sick,—the heart?"

"Why, no, why should he be?" said Jane, slightly resenting the remark, and Nikita's ready familiarity.

"Ah, why? Bad men, they are sick in the heart sometimes."

"Nikita, what are you hinting at? And why

do you want to see me? Why did you not come back for the skirts to launder?"

"Ah, Herr Waldie has much work for me to do. Oh, yes!" muttered Nikita with a leer that alarmed Jane.

"For you? Explain yourself!"

"Um!" said the gypsy with a grunt. "South Clark Street, State Street, Dearborn Street. Um, um, some women to see; some men, money to spend—oh, Nikita knows."

"Some women to see—some men—and money to spend—you?"

"Why not?—Herr Waldie, I know him."

"For heaven's sake, what are you saying?" gasped Jane.

"He have not paid the price full. No! No!" said Nikita, shaking her head.

"Tell me what you are talking about, I demand."

"Demand? Bah—"

"I entreat you as an old friend, as one woman to another."

"He promise—he break the promise. I break him in dis little hand, so!"

"What has he done?" persisted Jane.

"Oh, much—women, women—yes, always women!"

"I will not believe it!"

"No? Look at that," she said, handing Jane a torn and soiled paper.

"A marriage certificate! B. Waldie to Naomi Thompson. Woman, you are crazy!" cried Jane, almost beside herself.

"My girl his wife—deserted to marry you."

"Impossible! There is some mistake!"

"Herr Waldie, he pay through the nose sometime, I guess."

"You are a scheming, blackmailing gypsy. Go! before I call the police. Oh, what am I to believe?" cried Jane, sinking into a chair.

"Tell him Nikita lives for vengeance. I will; I will have his heart. Ah, Naomi, my child! Nikita lives—and revenge is sweet!" and with these threatening words, the gypsy mother slipped silently out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELBERT and Veo keenly enjoyed what they called "our educational observation tour-moon." She was in high glee and carefully packed the steamer trunks so that Elbert could readily find his library as well as his shirts, for her housewifely instincts made the most of every emergency for comfort. Elbert took copious notes, and Veo carefully copied and indexed them as they traveled here and there, visiting historic places. Travel with the purpose of observation is not included in school curriculum, but it is still considered an essential basis of education. With his early political experience, Elbert naturally made the capital city of Washington an objective point in the itinerary.

The ambitions of the days of his adolescence—the formative period of a man's career—were clustered about Washington. The biographies of famous men all appeared to Elbert as being centered about the dome of the capitol. To

see in reality the very scenes these heroes had looked upon, to touch things they had touched, to feel the same warmth and chill of the winds they had faced, was to be the consummation of his long-cherished dreams. These thoughts absorbed the young bridegroom as the train rattled on toward Washington over the same roadway that Lincoln passed when he first went to Washington as a congressman, little dreaming of the tragic and historic events that were destined to follow him there later.

It was raining when they arrived, and as they came from the station and saw before them Pennsylvania Avenue with its nocturnal glare, they looked instinctively for the dome and the monument. They had decided to stop at the hotel where Henry Clay had lived. Who can forget the impressions of a trip to the national capital? Every individual met on such a visit plays an important part in life's memories. Was this man at the desk in a slouch hat a real congressman? Perhaps he was a senator. Even the old colored porter might have been a slave owned by some noted southerner. They were assigned to the very room where the great

compromiser had breathed his last—so said the bell-boy.

“Why, we might expect to see his ghost tonight, Elbert,” said Veo mysteriously.

“These historical associations are inspirations, dear, but Henry Clay will scarcely leave the Elysian fields to do us honor,” said her husband.

“Well, I’m not afraid of anything when you’re around, Elbert,” said Veo, busily unpacking their bag.

Sightseeing in Washington is a honeymoon adventure. They visited the “points of interest” as thousands of bridal couples had before them. The Washington monument or the Capitol seem to be first on the list. They beheld the sweeping perspective of the reclaimed Potomac flats, historic Arlington Heights and Arlington House, formerly Robert Lee’s mansion, the Mall, the White House, the Treasury Building, and the Capitol from the tall shaft, and Veo’s interest became concentrated on the White House with its memories of Dolly Madison. Like all young wives, she felt that her husband was great enough to live there some

day. They followed the routine of tourists, threading the labyrinthine passages of the Capitol with a feeling of awe, whispering in the Rotunda, looking at the historic paintings and being deeply impressed with the rugged, massive solidity of the stairway. In the House of Representatives they looked down from the public gallery upon a mighty convocation of men whose continuous buzz recalled a blended country caucus and sewing circle. Several set speeches were being delivered, and Veo remarked under her breath: "Elbert, you could do better than that. I know you could. But what funny chairs and school desks," she continued. "A seat in Congress doesn't amount to much, after all, does it, Elbert?"

The Senate, with its impressive air of dignity, was in marked contrast to the House, and here Elbert indulged in an elaborate day-dream, for, in truth, these scenes tended further to stimulate the political ambitions of the young lawyer. In the Supreme Courtroom an air of repose and serenity surrounded the justices in their sombre black gowns, appropriate to final matured human judgment as to the last

kink in law. And this was the very room in which Webster, Clay and Calhoun had thundered senatorial orations in years past, to be printed later in school readers. Motion followed motion, but there was no commotion. A whispered conference may result in momentous decisions, and an occasional smile flitted from face to face like a gleam of sunshine. Each justice was absorbed in his work, as the shadowed light reflected his face in a Rembrandt background, apparently oblivious of visitors, but Elbert dreamed the dream of all young lawyers as he looked upon the tribunal.

Through Bart Waldie, Elbert was known to a number of politicians prominent in Washington. The more he saw of Bart's party friends, the less he thought of the party in which he had trained. His father's political beliefs began to take possession of him again, and like the prodigal son he returned to the political fold. He continued the practice of talking matters over with Veo, which when followed precludes the necessity of divorce courts.

"Elbert, why hesitate? It is surely not a crime to change one's political faith."

"I wonder what Bart and the old political friends in Chicago would think?"

"Well, you know, Elbert, we women have the privilege of changing our minds, and it seems to me you might exercise the same right."

That afternoon Elbert obtained a conference with a senator who was then in the zenith of his career as a leader, to whom he frankly told his plans.

"Is a political career advisable for me?" inquired Elbert.

"No, young man; decidedly, no! Do you see these gray hairs? Now defeated, now successful, maligned and chagrined, it is a bitter life. My advice to young lawyers is 'less office-holding and more law.' I hope soon to be able to retire before the election juggernaut arrives."

"Somehow I feel that I have a mission in the next campaign. When you see distressed conditions resulting from congressional stupidity, is it not time for new recruits to take their places in the business of the country?"

"Well," continued the statesman, playing with the paper weight, "know your subject

thoroughly, then people will listen to you, and if they listen, they are very apt to elect in these days. To comprehend tariff matters clearly, you ought to travel abroad, and make a study of actual conditions, without relying upon party traditions, political documents, or school-book theory. You should not attempt to go into a political campaign without being fully equipped."

The conversation, overheard by Veo, resulted in a serious conference in the room where Henry Clay had once rested, as to the feasibility of a trip abroad.

"We have three thousand dollars left, Veo, and that would buy a pleasant little home in Iowa where we could live."

"Yes, but, Elbert, you are too ambitious as a lawyer to be satisfied as a farmer."

"Well, there's my little wife—"

"Elbert, your little wife lives but for you. Your ambitions are my ambitions, and if you need to travel in Europe, why, we'll go."

"It is risking all our little fortune on the hope of my achievements when we return."

"Never mind, Elbert. We'll invest that

three thousand dollars in a future congressman of the U. S. A."

"My little inspiration," he exclaimed, as he kissed her to seal her plans and proposals of making him a statesman.

CHAPTER XIX

WE are on a voyage to discover the world," wrote Veo to Jane, "and Elbert is reversing the notions of Christopher Columbus, for we are going east, you see. Elbert observes and I am keeping house on the wing. We're so happy. I am beginning to feel like a congressman's wife already."

Arriving in Germany, Elbert at once began his special study of conditions in relation to the tariff question. He found it slow work, not being able to speak the language. Having no official letters to present, he was regarded with more or less suspicion, and found many of the larger manufacturing establishments in Germany closed to him—even some of those whose representatives he had befriended in America.

"Never mind, dear, the observations will loom large when we get home. Distance helps out," said Veo. "Now, let us enjoy our trip

just as much as if we were millionaires instead of a studious bridal party."

A voyage up the Rhine and the views of quaint villages and storied castles on either side inspired a deep-seated comprehension of the early history of Germany that books could never give. They walked, sometimes, from one village to another, and observed conditions that would illuminate the story of the tariff. At Drachenfels the ancient legends of the castles on the Rhine were recalled, as in a flood of sunlight they gazed on the beautiful valley beneath, and the winding river, fringed with historic crags, crested with purple forests, terraced with vineyards and capped with crumbling castle towers.

The well-worn path of tourists was disregarded, but they drifted to Weimar, the home of the poet Goethe, whose poems they had read together in courtship days, arriving at the Mecca of German literature and music at a time when all nature was under the spell of the impressive quiet of Sunday. These were the same scenes that inspired Goethe and Liszt. These were the same fields they had gazed upon.

This old gabled house, the deep ravine and viaduct, the old pump—these were familiar to Goethe, Schiller and Mendelssohn. They fairly tiptoed past Schiller's home, a tall, brick house with shutters, set close to the street. Around the corner was the long, low house where Goethe had lived so many years. At the right of the door, as they entered, was the broad stairway of well-worn oaken steps, leading from the long hall, with the statue of Juno at the opposite end; nearby was the harpsichord upon which Mendelssohn played. It all seemed like a dream to the young hero-worshippers. Veo sat down at the instrument and struck the majestic opening chords of the march from "Athalia."

The library, the old pine desks, the chair and table where Goethe sat and dictated in his declining days, even the elbow-cushion upon which he rested his arm when bowing his head in thought, still remained. Just off the library was a little room with a wainscoting of green cloth, containing a couch covered with a faded green spread. In the corner stood the table upon which rested the cup and saucer and some

medicine bottles, left as when he died. At the foot of the bed the old casement window swung open, and the branches of the trees just outside had grown closer as if to shelter the nook where the poet had closed his eyes in eternal slumber, as his soul passed into the infinite to greet the spirit of his own Marguerite.

"Oh, Elbert," whispered Veo, "such scenes as these come only once in a life-time. We can never forget this day."

"This moment is worth a college degree," said Elbert.

They stood arm in arm for some moments, feeling as if the kindly spirit of the poet beamed upon them.

Every day was crowded to its fullest capacity with sight-seeing. Baedeker was thrown aside, for the young comrades sought their own individual impressions. They sauntered on, now on foot and now on the trains, without a "personally-conducted" itinerary to guide their way.

Early in the morning, the young tourists were out among the markets, thus finding out just what the workmen were bringing, how they lived, and what they had to eat.

"Now for Frankfort," announced Elbert one morning.

"Well, at least I will find out the truth about sausages," smiled Veo. "You know, Elbert, we must mingle the practical with the poetic."

In the several decades that Europe has been the playground of travelling Americans, the motives of the trip of each individual are not discussed when countrymen meet across the sea. Any traveler that has the accent or looks of an American is more or less welcome, and the influence of European travel through Americans meeting Americans abroad, would be difficult to compass. Neighbors at home may be strangers, but in travel, acquaintance ripens quickly.

Whenever the Ainsworths met Americans, Veo was in high glee. At a hotel in Frankfort, Elbert was greeted by Mrs. W. Dannocks Daniels, whom he had met previously at Bart's home. She was trying to find her trunk. In a few minutes, Veo appeared, and the three were soon chatting away like life-long friends, and comparing notes of their trip. Mrs. Daniels was as brilliant in conversation as

ever, and her knowledge as an old traveler was not to be challenged. They met other friends during their travels, but Mrs. Daniels seemed to fit right into their little party. She was well versed in art and literature, and she and Elbert enjoyed many stimulating discussions during the days the three were sight-seeing together.

In Paris the American tourist-pilgrims felt the fascination of art, and spent much time in the galleries. Mrs. Daniels enthusiastically dilated upon the various paintings of the masters at the Louvre. Veo was more interested in studying the students on the scaffolds and in dark corners who were trying to imbibe the spirit of the great painters.

"We must not forget the poor tariff," pleaded Veo, in urging a visit to the country.

The sights of Paris were one series of wonderment. The Pantheon, with memories of Hugo, the Madeliene, L'Arc de Triomphe, Place de la Concorde, the July Column, all aglow with historical interest, made events of today more clear to Elbert as he drew comparisons of history that differ from the work of the class-room.

In France, he felt the sources of the sympathy with the American ideals. As he stood by Rousseau's statue near the Pantheon, he realized how the agitation in France has nurtured the kindred spirits in that era which resulted in assisting the colonies in the struggle for independence. Elbert made little progress in the study of facts and figures of the tariff question, but he felt that he was getting at the source of things. At Versailles, Mrs. Daniels revelled in an economic discussion, growing out of the tragedy of Marie Antoinette, with Madame Pompadour dairying and butter-making at the Little Trianon.

"Your predilection is literary rather than political, Mr. Ainsworth," said Mrs. Daniels one day.

"It may appear so, but my absorbing ambition is political, and our aspirations rather than our tastes govern us."

"Perhaps; but how much more one achieves in following what one loves."

"Our talents do not always harmonize with our aspirations."

"Then why oppose the inevitable?" she

insisted. "If you knew what I do of Washington and of political life, ambition would not lure you further in that direction."

In Brussels, Veo was taken ill.

"Too bad; the first day I've missed, Elbert. You and Mrs. Daniels must go and keep right after the philosophy and art, but don't forget the tariff."

"No, I'll stay here, Veo, and—"

"I'm not so ill as that. Now, that's a good boy; do go!"

Elbert and Mrs. Daniels visited the sights of Brussels together and continued their discussions. At the Wertz museum they disagreed as usual in an amiable discussion.

"There is something impressively grand in this place," she said enthusiastically.

"It reminds me more of a chamber of horrors! Of all the ghastly sights on earth—buried alive—mother burning her child—Napoleon in hell—penance for the lives and suffering his ambition had cost."

"We must know the realities of life; these paintings have an influence in giving us comprehension of shadows."

"The particular influence must be to induce suicide. Even the Homeric Patroclus and all these other heroic paintings have an insane and desperate look. It makes it appear almost a blasphemy, when they purport to portray the face of Christ."

"How masterly the strokes! The coloring is almost equal to Rubens," said Mrs. Daniels, coming closer to him to get a better view.

"Yes, they indicate vigorous muscular power, to be sure."

"The little sketches here of the painting indicate painstaking work, at least. The work reveals the personality."

"An egotistical cynic—and cynics are useless."

"It is always a matter of temperament," she replied coyly.

As they were leaving the vine-covered building, Mrs. Daniels took Elbert's arm as if she had won her point at least.

"I'm afraid you're becoming cynical. You take life too seriously for a young—what shall I say?—handsome young man with a brilliant future assured."

"Do you think so, Mrs. Daniels?" asked

Elbert, smiling again under the spell of her clever flattery.

"Yes, to enjoy life, one must learn to play, to cast convention to the winds just now and then. The human heart craves happiness, and that is found in love, in some form or another, irrespective of conventional decrees. Why restrain ourselves to Puritanic custom when we know it is cant and hypocrisy? Too often people are legally bound to uncongenial mates, and I choose to declare my independence as an individual."

"You don't mean—"

"Oh, no, I am not an adventuress. My life was embittered by a loveless marriage—since then I have played upon the cupidity of men and have grown to love the political game, but there are times I am heartily weary of the exciting life I longed for as a girl. Now with one I love I would dare the world's scorn and be—happy."

She was beautiful in her earnestness and sincerity. Their eyes met in a riveted gaze. It was that instant that determines the destiny of individuals. A face flashed before Elbert's

vision—two lustrous, innocent eyes reflecting a soul—eclipsing the glance that now held him. He realized the danger, and knew that the spell must be broken. Mrs. Daniels was truly a fascinating woman.

“I think I understand. Good night, Mrs. Daniels,” he said, abruptly as he left her.

CHAPTER XX

THERE was something about the ripening friendship between Elbert and Mrs. Daniels that Veo did not quite like, especially when their glances met and lingered, but, woman-like, she seemed to delight in leaving them together as much as possible. Perhaps she desired to test Elbert, but it was a cruel awakening to learn that a man may have eyes for more than one woman. She at last suggested a farewell party to Mrs. Daniels, but Elbert insisted upon parting without any ceremonies. Veo was astonished, but asked no further questions, though she snuggled closer to him when the door of the railway carriage was closed upon them, and they were finally on their way to England. Here Elbert resumed his work of investigation, and he lived among the workingmen to get the facts and their point of view. In fact, he became a real workman, donning a workman's blouse



The longed-for decision to appear as his attorney was given to Tony Turner, whom he found awaiting him at his office. The young man all but hugged Elbert in his joy

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and entering enthusiastically into his "tariff tramps" as Veo called them.

Through this experience, his appreciation of American protective tariffs impressed him as the only way in which the prosperity of all the people could be assured. He found the conditions of living among English workingmen so deplorable that he longed to return home. The competition American workingmen must meet with in open markets convinced Elbert that while a tariff may make some rich, it gives something to distribute among all. He had many heated arguments with English friends, and when he found that the badge of service formed a caste as widely separated as that formed by racial distinctions, his sympathies were with the working classes, and he felt a sincere interest in the laboring men of his own country. He decided that there was a mission in proclaiming and proselytizing economic and political problems as vital to the moral welfare of the people as a call to the cloth. The experiences of these months were an education in political economy such as years in the study of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill could not supply.

Personalities have their potential influence, and one of Elbert's early heroes was John Ruskin. Every thoughtful young person has his era of idealism. He felt that he must see the sage of "Brantwood" while yet he lived, that he might experience the inspiration of that great thinker's presence. Soon he and Veo were on their way to the North, walking much of the distance, sitting by a hedge or under some spreading tree at noon-time for a picnic lunch. Passing through Ambleside, Keswick, Grassmere and Dentwater, the beauties of the lake district were unfolded day by day. The coaching tour to Coniston, up the famous Yewdale Valley, immortalized by Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, gave the young Americans a comprehension of these English poets, denied to students of English literature in the atmosphere of a class-room.

At Coniston they found the villagers shaking their heads in a mysterious way when the visitors suggested calling on John Ruskin. Few of the neighbors were familiar with his works, and yet all seemed to love him. The home of the sage was across the lake, directly opposite

the village. Elbert ascertained that the aged philosopher took a daily walk to a little point of land farther up the lake, where he would sit for hours and watch the dark waters of Coniston wash upon the beach. "Brantwood" was in appearance an ideal philosopher's retreat among the bleak and wrinkled peaks, fringed at the base with forest and covered with a haze of purple heather. Elbert rowed across the black waters of the lake to a point just above where the sailboats were moored opposite the home. Clambering up through the brush to the road he passed little bits of pasture, orchards, flower and vegetable gardens, nestling at the foot of the rugged hills. The stone hut of a farmer in a sterile field farther up the hill indicated that at least one neighbor was within hailing distance of the lonely sage of "Brantwood." With awe Elbert approached the house through a tunnel of foliage. He tugged at the bell, but there was no response.

He rang again, and a maid came to the door, eyeing them suspiciously. Elbert asked to see John Ruskin.

"He is not receiving callers. Have you a

letter or a card?" was the curt response. Immediately Veo, with rare presence of mind, asked Elbert to show his passport. "That looks famously official and important, you know," she added.

When the maid had retired they stood in the little hall, with its red ingrain carpet, hungrily drinking in all of the details associated with the life of their hero. On the wall directly in front hung a charcoal sketch by Burne-Jones. A door led from the hall on either side, and the sound of a voice in the stillness thrilled the visitors. Could that be Ruskin's voice?

A servant returned, and Elbert, in a confused way, confessed his mission.

"It is not a pleasant intrusion, and you Americans are so impertinent," was the answer he received. Veo made a plea with moistened eyes, more in looks than by words, and the stern servant relented and invited them to enter Ruskin's study at the right of the hall. Before the fireplace was a straight-backed chair, upholstered in green, the favorite seat of the mighty word-painter. On the table and in the French window were flowers in

slender glass vases. Above the mantel was his famous collection of Greek relics. On the walls hung various sketches in charcoal, indicating Ruskin's passionate study of architecture. The little clock on the wall kept ticking away those precious minutes which were to leave impressions for a lifetime on two hero worshippers. Underneath the bookcases surrounding the room was Ruskin's famous geological collection, suggesting a similarity in taste with that of Goethe at Weimar. There seems to be an innate passion in great minds to collect the expressions of Nature. The graceful drapery of Virginia creeper over the casement at Brantwood brought to mind the old tree at Weimar.

And yet, John Ruskin was not there.

They passed out of the house absorbed in their hero worship. Passing through the arched driveway which penetrated a wing of the house, they suddenly came upon a tall, though stooped man, one shoulder much higher than the other, with his long, gray beard buttoned inside his coat, shaggy and fierce-looking eyebrows under which sparkled kindly gray eyes; on his head a white slouch hat, his hands behind him grasp-

ing a walking stick, moving along slowly, followed by his valet at a respectful distance. This was John Ruskin.

Veo and Elbert were so confused that neither could speak. The aged seer passed into the house, though not a word was spoken. He took his seat in the little green chair at the window, and picked up a broken bit of plate.

"Like human hopes—broken—broken," he uttered, swaying back and forth, but paying no attention to the devoted admirers who stood as if enchanted. Opposite the window on the bank of the lake was an old tree, the top branches of which had been wrenched off by a storm. A mass of ivy hung about the protruding trunk, as if to hide the ravages of the tempest, and the wide-spreading lower branches seemed outstretched in benediction as the sunlight played on the black waters of Coniston. How like the sage of Brantwood! His life, broken by storm and tempest, and yet clinging about it were the memories of his inspiring words, resting like a benediction upon the hopes of the young and ambitious.

Down the winding road walked Elbert and

Veo, with the refrain of "broken hopes" singing in their ears. No word was spoken, for they felt that their living idol was already in the borderland, drifting from the terrestrial to the celestial. The few moments at Brantwood had only deepened their devotion to the ideals of Ruskin.

For several hours that evening Elbert forgot the tariff indexes, and together they read aloud in an English inn, "Unto This Last" with new zest and understanding. "Sesame and Lilies" was now read with a new comprehension of the problems of life.

"Elbert, if the world demands a sad and pathetic career for great men, I believe you'd better stop trying to be great," said Veo. "I prefer having you just for you, than to have you trying to be a genius."

"Great men do not have all the sorrow," philosophized Elbert. "We all bear burdens, but the grief of the eminent seems more tragic because they are brought into prominence and interest so many people."

"So many writers appear to linger on the griefs of genius as the real source of inspiration

that it makes me sad, but just now I'm trying so hard to read and admire Ruskin—just to help you."

"My little wizard, *you* make me want to be great."

"If I can only continue to make you happy, Elbert, I don't care if I have to read Browning every morning before breakfast. What I love is just you, Elbert, and your happiness."

"You do make me so happy, little one. Must I keep on saying it every day?"

"Every hour, Elbert; a woman's heart is always hungry for that word from the man she loves."

He drew her closer to him and kissed her on the forehead between the truant curls. The memory of Mrs. Daniels and her disquisitions on art, philosophy and culture had vanished.

CHAPTER XXI

FINANCIAL problems have a way of intruding themselves to disturb poetic fancy. Elbert discovered that the remnant of his financial reserve had nearly vanished, and here he was dreaming dreams and traveling about like the decrepit millionaires for whom the ambitious fires of life had blown out.

"Veo, I am longing to return home, where everyone does not walk on tiptoe. We've plenty of notebooks if we are rather low on tariff lore," said Elbert.

They had at least acquired the distinction of having been abroad, and those were days when that counted as a distinction. The tour had developed the charm of companionship and had widened Elbert's vision of life. His radical notions suffered a collapse, and there was less boastfulness in comparing things American and things foreign. He realized that America with all her achievements was only a part of the world, after all; that hated corpor-

ations which politicians baited were in a way necessary evolution for public weal; that even royalty was not altogether obnoxious. In fact, with his loyalty to American institutions more fervid than ever his observation had broadened his horizon beyond the egotistic, even if self-reliant and energetic spirit of his own native land. Veo meekly confessed:

"Yes, we do talk through our noses, and say 'I guess,' and measure everything by bigness—but that includes big hearts in America just the same. I am longing for the free air of the old farm and Poplarville, Elbert," said Veo enthusiastically, "and when we get there we can just think it all over."

* * * * *

The return trip was uneventful, except for the overwhelming desire to get there when once started.

Arriving at Poplarville, Elbert continued his work of compiling notes and preparing to enter the fall campaign with new ideas evolved from old facts. Some of the village gossips looked upon his long stay abroad as evidence of shiftlessness and whispered that he

was living on his wife's father as a pensioner rather than a producer.

The perspective of a trip abroad made the village life of his own birthplace an interesting one to Elbert. His travel had enabled him to observe. The individuality of American villagers was in sharp contrast to the passive and ambitionless existence of similar classes in Europe, and he unconsciously found himself studying psychology with people around him as textbooks, but he loved them all as his own.

Elbert also awaited an event, which he felt was to complete, in a way, the cycle of great life experiences.

One day, in a state of great excitement, he went for Dr. Buzzer, and as that worthy gentleman came puffing down the lane he gave Elbert some of his well-seasoned knowledge.

"You young fellows get fearfully excited," said he. "Now you let me attend to this affair, and I'll see that Veo comes out all right. Time you've had nine or ten you'll not be so nervous, young man."

The young mother was cared for by Mrs. Ainsworth, with a tenderness equal to that

of her sainted mother. "God save little Veo," was the continuous prayer of Elbert during those hours of suspense.

When the little red-faced infant was placed in his arms, what a thrill it gave him! "My child! Veo's baby! Our own flesh and blood—a new bud to blossom with the years!"

"Our own baby. Are you happy, Elbert?" whispered Veo.

"My precious wife; my little queen!"

The baby began to cry.

"Our dear little baby," whispered Veo, and her face was wreathed in the radiant, angelic expression of young motherhood—the inspiration of Raphael's Madonna, and myriads of other attempts to portray the ineffable sweetness of maternal tenderness.

He was now a father! Elbert could scarcely realize it. All other ambitions are now put aside—wife and baby come first. "Oh, God, I thank Thee for Thy goodness," he prayed inwardly, and felt the presence of the Deity impelling that secret prayer which many men pour forth in a crisis, although they may be loth to acknowledge it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE realization that he was now actually a "family man" awoke Elbert to the fact that he must make some arrangements for an income. He decided to go direct to Washington and meet in person the men who were the political powers that "expected to be" before launching his campaign to win a congressional nomination. There was a pang in parting from his little chum-wife, but Baby Veo was flourishing, and he felt that now the little one would take up most of Veo's time and he would have to complete his tariff speeches alone.

In Washington he found scores of other young men like himself ready to enlist, but already the political plums were distributed. Matters began to look very discouraging, when Elbert chanced to meet a member of the President's Cabinet. They were enjoying an evening smoke when Elbert confided to him his ambitions.

"Bad thing, this depending on politics, young man. That's why I'm a horse doctor," said the secretary, stroking his long, gray beard, with a twinkle in his eye. "And here I am, loaded and primed for the campaign, but with no assurance of expenses being provided, to say nothing of a reward later."

"Come to New York with me next week and we'll see how the National Committee commissary feels about putting on more pneumatic pressure in the way of speakers."

This was the first ray of hope for Elbert, and he spent the intervening time preparing speeches. Some of his observations that week shriveled his ideals of American statesmen.

Prominent political friends sometimes name their successors for places on the political chessboard, and when Elbert was known as "the secretary's friend"—that was enough. Dates were arranged and he donned his oratorical armor for the campaign with the flush of a crusader on his cheek. A few speeches in the New England states did not attract any especial attention, but in these he was only rehearsing. Later he appeared with men of national repu-

tation, and his vigor, his eloquence, his thorough knowledge of the questions at issue, his graphic pictures of the actual condition of European workingmen in contrast to those of America made him felt as a power in the campaign field. The tariff facts and trip abroad were proving a reserve power. He was heralded as the "young whirlwind," and his caustic and sharp fighting qualities brought him quickly to the front. The committee no longer haggled over his expense account. In those few months he proved the man possessed the theme, and improved the occasion which made him one of the foremost of the new orators in the campaign. His speeches were considered too melo-dramatic for making votes at times, but he always carried the throng with him in spite of the severe criticism of the opposition newspapers.

There were times when Elbert's sudden success came near turning his head, but in the exciting whirl of the campaign, two or three letters a week reached him from "Your own Veo and Baby," which brought him back to realities.

"I would like to speak at Poplarville," he said one day to the chairman.

home—the first time such a distinction had offered itself to him. Only a minute to greet wife and baby and partake of a bit of supper, and the Committee arrived to escort him to the speakers' stand located under the trees. It was a blaze of triumph. Hundreds of people had gathered there, the voters having driven in from the farms for miles around, and the torches gave "the corners" a holiday glare. The brass band scarcely ceased playing. It was an event of importance in the history of the township, and when Elbert arrived there was a wild shout when the boy of Poplarville was announced by the judge as "the speaker of the evening." He spoke as he had never spoken before, feeling that he knew each individual hearer, but the speech did not appear to awaken the enthusiasm anticipated. The meeting that had started in so gloriously had rather chilled in the early frost that had already settled on the pumpkins in the fields nearby.

"Oh, we expected too much, perhaps. It's only Elbert Ainsworth."

"The same old speech he's been giving for months. I've read parts of it a dozen times in

the papers," commented the hard-headed farmer neighbors.

On the other hand, he had a number of friends who after the address gathered about to congratulate and shake with him. He was about to leave for home with Dr. Buzzer when a lady came in to greet him.

"What, you here, Mrs. Waldie?" said Elbert, in surprise.

"Yes, Elbert; I am here where I started years ago, to begin life over, and have accepted the school for another year."

"Why, what is the cause of this?" he inquired anxiously.

"It is a long story, Elbert, and I'll not stop now to relate it. You did splendidly."

"Come, and stay with us. Have you seen Veo?"

"I will see you all tomorrow," she said quietly, as she left him.

* * *

After Bart's quarrel with Elbert, and Nikita's revelation to Jane, husband and wife drifted farther apart. Jane made frequent and long visits to Poplarville, and the gypsy seemed

to shadow her until the villagers began to talk. It was during the absence of Elbert and Veo abroad, that Jasper Juniper, as justice of the peace, became interested. He had secured at least an inkling of Nikita's story and journeyed to Chicago to talk it over with Bart and see in what way he could assist him.

He had known Bart's parents in Indiana before removing to Poplarville. Bart was surprised to see him because a visit to the city was a great event in Jasper's career.

"I took the first train yesterday. Plutarch says: 'When you've business with a man go and see him, don't write.' So here I am. Bart, I must see you. Sit down there, man, and listen to me. I've known you since you were knee high to a grasshopper, but what I want to know is, can I help you?"

"I don't know. What's the matter?" answered Bart languidly.

"Things are whispered around the village, ugly things against you, Bart, and I've traced them all to this gypsy woman, Nikita. I sent the deputy sheriff for her. I examined her, and now, Bart, I want to know if the stuff

she told me is true or not. Does the she-fiend speak the truth?"

"Partly yes and partly no."

"Just tell me, Bart. Give me the truth."

"It's the old story of an escapade and a sad awakening. Wesley got in trouble with a pretty little flower girl on Clark Street. He was engaged to Jane at the time, so he put my name on the marriage certificate. After Wesley's death, I paid the girl money to protect Jane—and, Jasper, she must never know. I played the game to protect her and my brother's good name. The proofs are all here, but I'm not going to welsh now."

"And Nikita?" asked Jasper.

"Is her mother, who has been persistently holding me up for blackmail. Jasper! Life is real, earnest, weak, passionate, devilish, tender, pathetic, true and false. Have you any idea—you, living in the quiet, peaceful simplicity of Poplarville—have you any idea how many times a day, in every large city every day in the year vice is actively at work, and even seems a virtue in comparison to evils that lurk in the guise of goodness and respectability?

But I have clung to one old-fashioned virtue in honoring true womanhood as I would my mother. I have nothing more to say in defence—only this, that before marrying Jane I determined to protect Wesley's memory with my life, if needs be. I sent Naomi to New York, paid Nikita two thousand dollars for final settlement, the surrender of the certificate. I have it here and meant to destroy it long ago."

He opened his desk and from a small drawer used for legal documents, took out a bundle of papers. He turned them over, slowly at first then confidently, and then curiously, and at last with much agitation took out all the papers and went over them one by one. His face was convulsed with anger, but the pallor of fear fought with the red flush of rage. "Gone!" he exclaimed, "that she-devil has stolen it. Now I understand why she came through here for her washing."

"Then you have seen her recently?"

"Yes; she has followed me like a fiend. This is the work of political enemies, and not the woman alone."

"We know you, Bart—Minnie Mary, the

Doctor and I—everyone. These things pain us all. What can I do to bring you back to your wife? You'd better tell the truth to her."

"I cannot. I have thought I was a good husband. I love her devotedly, but she must never know, Jasper, about Wesley. He first won her heart, and that awful murder made me want to protect them both."

"I believe it. Bart, your nature makes you strong friends and strong enemies.. You are wrong in your goodness and wrong in your bitterness. There's Elbert, for instance."

"Why did he not stick to his friends? Is an ingrate to be trusted? Now I am ruined, and almost a bankrupt."


"Yes, I know; but even ideals of superior virtue vary. In Fowler on 'Common Sense,' for instance—"

Jane came in just then.

"My dear," said Bart, rising, "Jasper will tell as much as can be told now of the Nikita affair, and—"

"Not now, Bart, I cannot bear it today. I—"

This was all, but Jane's broken-hearted objection aroused Bart's fury.



"Not now? See, Jasper, that is the woman of it; they seem to enjoy nursing sorrows as if they were a pleasure. I—"

"Bart, listen, listen," said Jasper.

"I will not listen. It is all over. Jane, I cannot stand this cool contempt," he continued, turning away with suppressed feeling, and losing control of himself, he fled out of the house without a good-bye.

There was a flood of tears, and Jasper tried to comfort the miserable woman.

"Mrs. Waldie, I don't know what to say. If worse comes to worse, you'd better come back to Poplarville. There's always a welcome for you there."

Worse did come to worse, and a little while later Jane left for her old home in Poplarville, to begin anew the struggle of life, and there Elbert had found her.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEW stars in the political firmament are regarded with jealous suspicion by some of the older politicians and by favor with others who are looking for an opportunity to renew political youth with the alluring cosmetics of a coming reform labeled "Advanced Ideas." Elbert found that it required something more than a "hit" to gain a foothold. The quick process he discovered was to attack something and give his speeches the semblance of courage and honesty and crystallize "a message" that would capitalize popular prejudice. The manipulators had their machinery well-adjusted and he felt that an organization of some kind was necessary to gain a foothold to fight the bosses. The records proved that "outs" are easier to organize than "ins." It was now a problem whether to smash things and gain a position in the limelight quickly, or to hold fast to honest convictions and take his turn in a man to man contest.

When a young politician's power begins to attract popular notice and his strength is indicated by a definite following, then thoughts are entertained of admitting him as a possibility, without further initiatory ceremonies, if he has maintained his party regularity. Elbert's experience with "Boss Bart" inclined him toward a process of slow growth. Judging from his success as a campaign orator, he had visions that a congressional nomination would follow, as a natural corollary, but he found the ambitions of other men in the way. They looked for the honor as the reward of long years of party service and contributions to campaign funds. He observed that the most prominent aspirants for state political honors usually hailed from the more remote country districts, where they were enabled to attach to themselves a concrete following and to exercise the individualism and independence involved in winning a state or congressional leadership, which the distracting jealousies of the city would not permit.

After this analysis, he concluded to give up the practice of law in the city and begin

a political apprenticeship in his own home district. He realized the cumulative effect of the old acquaintanceship in making new friends, and that the vote of cities naturally tended toward the party in whose ranks he had served in early years and from which he had withdrawn as a matter of slow growth, thought and fixed conviction.

Elbert's first political wires were laid by having friends in Poplarville casually announce him as a delegate to the State Convention, especially on Saturday afternoons when the farmers "come to town" to trade and talk over matters. A systematic campaign was inaugurated, utilizing Bart Waldie's plan, following up every possible advantage of having one name talked about more than others. The beginning was rather discouraging as Elbert was regarded as an interloper by the men who usually "ran things" in the district. They had been in power so long that he became the logical leader of a movement against "the old ring." He had the ready support of the many disappointed in securing favors, and the periodical public spasm for a change was imminent. After a

series of the old-time caucus contests he was successful in being named as a delegate to the State Convention preceding the next general election.

The same reaction against the political powers that were in the saddle was felt in that invisible undercurrent observed with apprehension by the older heads at the State Convention. The cry of the opposition was to "give the young men a chance!" Elbert was not overlooked in the generalization, and he noted the constant recurrence of his name in print, even though with satire and some rugged abuse, with complacent satisfaction. As in the old case of sarsaparilla and pills, much abuse is better than faint-hearted praise. Vocalized testimonials have a subtle power, and reach places where the printed or written word is ineffective. They were the usual social greetings and hearty handshakes and slaps on the back as the delegates gathered at the State Convention. Elbert was in the hotel lobby early and late, making acquaintances and forming various combinations. The mysterious nothings of political plot and coun-

ter-plot were talked as the little groups began watching each other and noting the line-up between the men anticipating honors and those who were supposed to hold the combinations in handling delegations. Elbert developed his first positive strength in uniting the delegates from his home district. Then he proceeded to make up a slate with four State officers from his own part of the state in the various combinations so that if the first failed, three chances remained. The young farmer-lawyer from Poplarville became the special champion of the farmers' interests, and his familiarity with political and parliamentary tactics at once gave him the distinction of a "leader." The cohesive element of self-interest and sectional pride representing various parts of the state was indicate in "making up" the slates—Elbert's comrades feeling that he "knew the ropes." because he had dealt before with the city fellows in political convention.

"Ask for everything and keep up a bold front or we will get nothing," was Elbert's counsel to his colleagues; and they carried to him

every shade or suspicion of gossip as to what this and that delegation were doing.

A contest was waging between two factions in the party headed by prominent leaders, and the weaker side sought an alliance with Elbert. He formulated the terms of a coalition, which included naming the temporary chairman to herald "the keynote address," and the chairman of the credential committee. Elbert and his district delegation were purposely ignored in committee appointments by the chairman of the so-called machine powers who apparently controlled the organization. At the recess this fact was used to further solidify his own delegation and to bring into his camp all the disappointed elements.

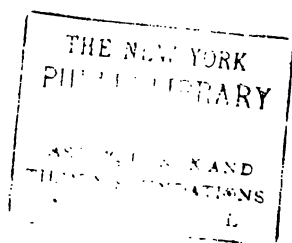
There was no luncheon for Elbert during the recess, and at two o'clock he was ready for the contest. He felt that there was a fighting chance, although there were only four nominations to make on the state ticket with five candidates already promised by the old leaders. This was a proposition of four divided by five to equal one. The five candidates conceded as entitled to the honors, were beginning to

grow restive and call together their friends. One of these men, Hon. Abijah Holmes, was from Elbert's district, a good-natured retired farmer who loved to frequently hear his name "prominently mentioned." He was not a politician, and he naturally delegated Elbert to take charge of his "flight to fame." Elbert conceived the idea of making a show of a determined fight for Hon. Abijah, but the majority of the home delegates wanted to have the chronic applicant defeated in a soothing way. If this were done, it was plain to Elbert that the district delegation would stand closer together in the future, and effectually dispose of his only rival for future honors in the congressional race when Tom Dalton chose to retire. It was a situation that demanded that this opportunity be made the most of in qualifying himself as a leader.

The first ballot was a struggle between the Titans. Elbert and his delegation remained steadfast to their promise, and the so-called machine nominee narrowly escaped defeat on the first roll-call. Then Elbert arose, mounted a chair and, in a passionate plea for peace and

harmony, moved the nomination of the defeated candidate by acclamation for the next office on the ticket. It was an unexpected move and succeeded in breaking the slate—a surprise that almost stampeded the Convention. This left only two places for the three aspirants on the chosen list. Elbert tried in the spirit of zealous friendship to force his home candidate on the next ballot as a “sacrifice hit,” to use the significant phrase of the baseball diamond. This aroused the suspicions of the friends of the candidate next on the list to be named with whom Elbert had made a combination, and they began to fear seriously for their own welfare. The nomination of the two men representing opposing factions on the same ticket, indicated that some of the remaining candidates on the slate must lose, as the proportion of candidates for places remained the same.

All of the perfected combinations of the morning were thrown into confusion. Friends became foes even while the roll-call proceeded, and Elbert’s home candidate was defeated by a close vote. This left only one place and two





They had decided to stop at the hotel where Henry Clay had lived. They were assigned to the very room where the Great Compromiser had breathed his last—so said the bellboy

candidates. In forcing a quick vote and pushing a defeated candidate from one place to another on the ticket, Elbert had shuffled the Convention cards in a way that baffled his own allies.

As the nominating speech of the last man on the machine slate was being made, Elbert heard whispers among his own delegation that he had sold them out. He saw at a glance that the plan of shelving the congressman from his district at the later congressional convention to make room for a new man, might prove a boomerang to him—they had surmised his purpose. He arose, and, without warning, paid a glowing tribute to the candidate whom he was supposed to oppose, feeling that one place on the ticket with harmony for his faction was better than two with discord, endangering the election of the state ticket. It created a sensation, and he followed with a plea for fair play, insisting that all the nominees had been chosen from one side of a dividing line in the state, and that his own half of the state was not represented.

"You men," he continued, "are too fair

and too loyal to your party to deny the entire western part of the state at least a representation on the ticket." He closed with a tribute to the party, insisting that its traditions and principles would never countenance injustice; that this portion of the state was a great bulwark of strength to the party, deserving recognition. The effect was to bring Elbert forward as a broad-minded leader and fair fighter, and his opponents of only a few moments ago became his allies, and his allies became his opponents. The defeated candidate could not resist the opportunity of charging treachery somewhere—but where? Elbert pulled the coat-tails of his colleagues who were on their feet anxious to reply to the implied charge of treachery. "We submit ourselves even to misrepresentation for the sake of harmony in the party; we ask this favor not for ourselves but for the farmers of the western half of a fair state," shouted Elbert, as a parting shot in the debate.

The result of the ballot was awaited in suspense. The galleries ceased shrieking and cheered. There was a wild outburst of applause

as the last district was polled, for the delegation had divided its vote and nominated a young man chosen by the machine. The adherents of the second candidate whom Elbert had nominated by acclamation came to his rescue, although in the ballot just preceding they were bitterly opposed to each other. The delegation from the Poplarville district cheered wildly, standing on the chairs, when they realized that Elbert had won the fight, and even forgot the fate of the "Favorite Son" who had been lost in the exhilarating shuffle of events. Elbert was made the hero of the hour—he was now a leader—he had succeeded! "You are an honor to our state," said Ronald Ribeaux, the successful nominee, coming across the hall to shake Elbert's hand, "and if there is anything I can ever do for you call on me."

Elbert took mental note of the promise as his thoughts centered upon a certain congressional nomination that was soon to be made.

The events of that Convention gave Elbert Ainsworth political prominence throughout the State, and particularly in his own congressional district. Each one of the delegates at the

state gathering went home feeling a personal interest in the future of that young "whirlwind."

As he had planned, Elbert followed the State Convention with an active canvass for his nomination as congressman. It brought him a large number of supporters who had been fellow delegates. The unsettled political situation at that time augured well for a new man. The cry of the demagogue was loud in the land, and shrewd politicians began to tremble or use the cry themselves to get there first with the cymbals sounding reform with the big R. Nobody was surprised when Elbert won the congressional nomination the following year. He could scarcely realize that the dreams of his youth had come true. He recalled how distinguished a man Hon. David Sheldon had always appeared when he came to Poplarville, and he ordered a frock coat forthwith. He had not been elected, but this was a period of political landslides.

CHAPTER XXV

IT was while in the midst of the campaign for election that Elbert received a call for help from Hon. Ronald Ribeaux, the young man he had placed on the state ticket some time before, who had later been nominated for Congress in another district. Elbert freely gave the required assistance, although he did not exactly like the method which Ribeaux had taken in pushing himself to the front politically. Not satisfied with his State office, and feeling that he wanted to go to Congress, young Ribeaux had "shown his teeth" when his patrons asked him to wait and take his turn. In order to win, he had made criminal charges against his former benefactors and made them pay fines out of the same money with which they had helped him obtain a start in the political field. This indicated that Ronald Ribeaux would stop at nothing to push himself on in the race now that he had tasted political blood. He was an organizer and knew how

to play upon the passion and cupidity of humanity collectively and individually.

Ronald Ribeaux was, instinctively, vindictive by nature and a type of the Ego leadership of the age that was ready to sever all bonds that retarded the power to enforce his will. He had in view the honors of the United States Senate and even the Presidency. His plans sometimes involved a deliberate treachery toward those who helped him if they were in his way. He wanted his exclusive rights and privileges as the only real friend of the people, and attacked the honesty of all who opposed with no regard for the grace of gratitude. He was for "Little Ron" first, last and always. His positive ways developed a bristling brusqueness and his continuous appeal to the pecuniary passions stirred up the people with a feeling that they were being robbed by monopolists, utilizing the machinery of government, while he continued to use public funds in creating new bureaus and cutting salaries to help build up his organization.

The lively campaign had drawn to a close, and Elbert had returned home to enjoy election

day with Veo, who had remained at Poplarville where her father had recently moved, to be with him during Elbert's speaking tour. Silas Chatsworth was standing at the gate, and called out to Dr. Buzzer who drove past the door:

"Hey, Buzzer, have you voted yet?"

"No, not yet. I'm on my way for the Judge. He's rather feeble of late, so I thought I'd tote him down in my rig."

"Get out the full vote if you can. Send down Shandy for my bay mare. All the horses are out on the farm. By the way, Veo's been ailing lately."

"Noticed that for the last week. Silas, look out for her; any sudden excitement is liable to—"

"Better stop on your way back and take another look at her."

"Will bring her out all right," said the Doctor cheerily.

As Elbert came out of the house, the farmer spoke to him:

"Elbert, are you going up to the village this evening? It's only an hour before the polls close. Seems to me you would be anxious to know how the things are going."

"Can't tell; perhaps so. Veo's not well and I dislike to leave her alone with the baby."

"Well, there's Minnie Mary—and me."

"You! I fancy, father, your days for handling babies are gone by."

"Humph! A grandfather's hand is the hand of experience. Better not reflect on your Uncle Dudley in that way."

Abner Tomer, in passing, looked in at the two men and said, excitedly:

"Elbert, you'd better go to Dunham's, over the river, if you don't want to get left on that township. They're 'bout ten ahead of ye, so'm told. They need some money over there, more'n a week's wages."

"Well, Tomer," said Elbert, "if I am elected to Congress, I wish to be under no suspicion of bribery."

Minnie Mary came rushing out of the house.

"Elbert, Veo wants you quick. Abner, run down—that is, if you can run, and send Jasper here. Veo's taken sudden and wants to see him. Oh, Abner, just go in my back door—no, tell Jasper to—tell him to bring me two yards

of red flannel, he'll find it in my top drawer, and Abner, Abner—tell him to bring my thimble on the window-sill in the sitting room," shrieked Minnie Mary.

"Darn women, anyhow," mumbled Abner, and shuffled off.

"Can't find a decent thimble anywhere," continued Minnie Mary. "Mrs. Chatsworth, dear Lucy, left a thimble on that window when she died; but land o' Goshen, that was five years ago. Veo's worse and I sha'n't go home tonight. 'Sides, I 'spect Elbert will be elected to Congress today. If he is, everybody will be up here sure as gunpowder. Now hustle, and have everything that'll hold water clean and ready."

Elder Whoops at that moment drove by and Minnie Mary saluted him:

"Elder, stop a bit; don't go by. How is Sister Whoops? Well, I hope? And all the olive branches, young and old, from Melancthon down to Victoria?"

"Sister Snow middlin', thank you, middlin'."

"Any news?"

"None; just voted for Elbert. If he is

elected, say a good word for me. Tell him to have me appointed chaplain in the new prison. I can fill the charge, and Sister Snow, if there's a small piece of your renowned pumpkin pie in the larder and a hunk of head-cheese, I can stay the inner man till I get home. It's no trouble, I hope."

"Not in the least, Elder; come in. Just wait a minute," said Minnie Mary, putting down her work and going out. Elbert assisted Veo into the room, gently supporting her in his arms.

"Why, here's Elder Whoops," said Elbert, pushing the chair in which he had placed Veo toward the window. "Good evening, Elder; been to town? How's the election?" continued Elbert.

"Yes; just been and voted for you. Drove in on purpose. The talk is that you will go to Congress by two thousand majority," said the elder, with a flourish of his whip.

"That'll be perfectly lovely," said Veo, with a quiet smile.

"I hope so. Political honors do not appear the same to me as they did a little while ago,"

said Elbert, as he tenderly laid his hand on Veo's.

"Here, Elder," broke in Minnie Mary, as she returned with the pie.

"Thank you, sister. Your pies are—dear me—we never stop talking of that wedding supper you got up for Veo," said the Elder, taking large bites.

"Why, that's nearly four years ago, Elder," said Veo.

"So long?" said the Elder, with his mouth full.

"Jasper Juniper, did you get me the flannel?" broke in Minnie Mary, as her sharp eyes caught a vision of Jasper coming up the road.

"Couldn't find it, so I brought you a piece of cotton," Jasper replied meekly.

"Cotton! I don't want cotton. Now—Land o' Goshen! Nothing ready to give the boys, when they come to cheer Elbert's election! I must get something ready with just a taste of acid with the water when they come tonight. Thank goodness, I've got five pans of gingerbread baking."

"Buzzer said he'd stop in a minute with the news," said Jasper, turning to Elbert and

Veo, "but I can't wait for him. Mrs. Speigles wants her shoes tonight, and I've not finished the last essay for the Lyceum on "Plutarch as a Prophet." Then the boys want me to lead the procession tonight. Anything more you want, Minnie Mary?"

"Come back surely, Uncle Jasper," called out Veo.

"Don't worry, Veo, I'll be back," called out the good-natured cobbler.

"Elbert, your ship is nearing port. I can almost see its sails near at hand. Will it bring the word you wish to hear?—my dear boy, what tidings will it bring?" said Veo.

"My own little captain is nervous. My election is assured and good tidings are at hand."

But Elbert never forgot those words.

"What are you doing, Elbert?" continued Veo, as Elbert sat down to write at the table.

"I suppose the boys will call on me for a speech tonight if I'm elected. Must have something ready, you know."

"Let me sit here while you write," said Veo, leaning her head upon his shoulder. "Just go on with your work; I won't disturb you."

"I never want you a moment from me, my precious wife; you are my inspiration," said Elbert, kissing her. "Now, let me think," as he wrote, " 'Fellow-citizens and neighbors,' " read Elbert " 'this honor brings with it a sobering sense——' "

"You can think while I sew, can't you?" broke in Veo.

"Yes, yes; now let me see, where was I? Oh, yes;—'sobering sense of responsibility to so adjust the agricultural and labor interests—'," continued Elbert, reading aloud as he wrote.

"I won't talk, Elbert, but when do you suppose Jane is coming?"

" 'That the wage workers,' " said Elbert, as he kept on writing a moment without speaking. "What did you say?"

"Jane; when will she come?"

" 'Unquestionably the tariff interests,' " said Elbert, going on with his writing. "Oh, Jane; I suppose she will be down to supper—glad she is coming; want to see her about Bart," he said, writing all the time he was talking. " 'Then the duty on steel rails——' "

"Oh, Elbert, that pen scratches so. It acts as if it were vexed. It makes me nervous. Let me get you another to finish with."

"This is all right."

"Oh, Elbert, didn't you know the baby had a tooth?"

"Has it? 'Where from a tooth' " he scratched " 'from a baby—where the wool is raised on our farms—where—the—farmer—the baby, the home——' " He got up and threw the pen down in disgust as Veo arose with him.

"Baby's crying, Elbert; you won't mind it if I go and lie down a little while; I'm so tired—but I feel that I ought to help you with your speech."

"No, darling wife," he said, stooping and kissing her.

"Hold me closer, dear, I feel so queer, somehow—just as though—Oh, Elbert, would you be very, very sorry if I should go away?" she said, giving him that old, soulful glance.

"Don't talk that way, my little darling, don't!"

"I can't help it, Elbert. Something tells me, dear, that—but oh," sobbing, "how can I ever bear to leave you and the baby!"

"For God's sake, don't talk so, Veo. You make my heart ache. You'll be better soon. We are going to Washington, and the change—"

"Perhaps—perhaps, dear boy—I hope so. But promise me this, that if anything should happen, and I should have to leave you, you will bury me under the old tree, our trysting place, near Jasper's shop."

"Veo dear, please don't—I can't stand it. Buzzer says you are soon to be strong; you well be better tomorrow. Of course you will. You are only tired."

"I'm so tired, dear. Hold my hand, I want you near me. Why Elbert, you are weeping," said Veo suddenly. "Please don't cry, dear."

"No, pet. Just go to sleep, little wifey," said Elbert, and he laid her down gently on the lounge.

* * * *

Loud shouts came ringing down the road, interspersed with the blare of tin horns and the ringing of cowbells. "Elbert is elected!" "What's the matter with Poplarville!" "Three cheers for Veo!" and a mammoth bonfire was

lighted just outside as the crowds gathered around the windows and veranda, the small boys perched in the trees and upon the long hitching posts in front.

Dr. Buzzer came rushing in the door, wringing Elbert's hands, and slapping him on the back. The joyous tears ran down his weather-beaten cheeks, unheeded, and his voice was husky as he said: "Always said so, my boy—always said so."

In response for the general shout for a speech, Elbert appeared at the window and begun in the clarion tones that had been heard in every township in the district: "Fellow-citizens! This is the happiest moment of my life—"

"Elbert, come here quick; look at Veo!" cried Minnie Mary, who had just entered the room.

Veo had started up from her place on the lounge, and was frenziedly tearing at the laces about her throat, and gasping for breath, while her big eyes, like twin firebrands, gazed fixedly out of her wan face. Elbert rushed to her, taking her in his arms. "Veo," he pleaded, panic-stricken, "what is the matter? Veo, speak to me!"



"Bart, I must see you. Sit down there, man, and listen to me. I've known you since you were knee high to a grasshopper, but what I want to know is, can I help you?"

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She raised her glorious eyes to his, then with a little shuddering breath, just a ghost of a sigh, lay still in his arms.

"Doctor, do something, do something!" moaned Elbert.

The doctor knew it was hopeless, but felt her pulse, then, with head averted, walked away.

Going to the window, Dr. Buzzer put up his hand; the shouts ceased in an instant, and even the flickering shadows of the bonfires began to fade away.

Veo's lips had scarcely moved, but her eyes had said good-bye. Elbert kissed her and laid her down, and left the weeping friends with his dead. Not a tear could flow. He was dazed. The huzzahs of the multitude a moment ago seemed like hollow mockery. Why should he have to lose his life inspiration in the hour of triumph? Memories of their happy life came rushing through his mind. Had he always been kind to her? Was his ambitious struggles worth while without Veo?

A noise from the cradle startled him. "Poor little motherless babe," he cried, and then the torrent of tears broke forth.

“Veol! Veol! My wife! My love! Speak! Oh, God, the light of my life has gone out!” and he sobbed over the cradle, mingling his cries with those of the motherless babe.

Elbert’s ship had arrived. Death was at the helm, and Ambition, with a mocking smile, brought him the treasured realization of his dreams, but how paltry they seemed with the light of those beloved eyes forever dimmed!

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE is scarcely a hamlet in the broad area of the United States that does not have its little church. The spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth, of the cavaliers at Jamestown, the followers of Baltimore and Penn, with Wesley and Oglethorpe coming later, prevails in the impulse of religious worship that followed the struggle for freedom of religious belief as well as in civil affairs. In Poplarville there was a church, but it was not so much of a social center as in other smaller communities. One reason for this was its location up the road, far from the other activities of the place, and "thereby hangs a tale." One of the early pioneers was Ebenezer Snow, who located on government land and took possession of many acres. He was past middle age when he moved West, and in his home were evidence of early educational advantages—a library containing a bust of Shakespeare and the only real oil painting then known

in the community. He was in a way a recluse, and after his wife passed away, leaving Minnie Mary, his only daughter, motherless, he proceeded to build a memorial church on his land, which he turned over to the first denomination that came along. Elder Whoops was the lucky man, and the organization he represented kept right on allowing Ebenezer Snow to pay the bills. In fact, the church was known as "Snow's Church," which rather jarred on the ears, for "Whoops at Snow's Church" did not seem to possess any great degree of dignity or sanctity. It broke the heart of Ebenezer Snow, the attendance dwindled, and one day they found him dead on the doorstep of the church that he had taken so much pride in erecting—evidently a suicide. Minnie Mary was left little after all the church debts were paid, as required in her father's will; but she had become very important in the village of Poplarville, especially upon the occasion of weddings and funerals.

This strange story accounted for the fact that instead of the usual church burial ground the little village had set aside a neighboring

hillside for its interments. But Veo was buried under the old tree, at the four corners, as she had requested. It was a shock to the general notions of the people to have an interment anywhere but in the new burial ground, but in the case of Veo it seemed all right. It was a pathetic gathering; nearly all the guests at the wedding were present at the obsequies.

To Elbert life seemed blank and purposeless. He left soon after for Washington to take his seat in Congress, and yet how empty were all the once-coveted honors! In the first flush of political success he was as one dead. When alone at night, he would sit for hours and look at Veo's picture, then the baby's face smiled upon him out of the future. He felt the need of solace and comfort, and plunged into his work.

* * * *

When the new administration had assumed control, Elbert made a special effort to prevent his old friend Bart from being removed from his position of United States Marshal at Chicago, and his political friends were amazed.

"Don't you know that he is one of the most

perniciously active partisans on the list?" argued Ronald Ribeaux to Elbert, as they met in the committee room of Congress. "We must have in office only men who are with us, heart and soul."

"That may be, but he does his duty and makes a good officer. Let him remain," pleaded Elbert.

"If that rule should be adopted, what is there going to be left for us?" persistently argued Timothy O'Higgins, one of the leaders.

"That is all right, Tim, but I'll tell you why I'm so interested," and he told him of his relations with Bart in the early days.

"If it requires all my share of appoints, I'm going to forfeit them all to keep Bart there," said Elbert decisively.

Bart Waldie, living alone in Chicago, had gradually broken down under the strain of events, which resulted in a serious illness. Jane was telegraphed for and she left at once for the city with Minnie Mary to nurse him back to health. Long, weary, tedious hours of watching and waiting were rewarded in the "turn for the better," which snatched Bart

from the grip of death. And with his recovering strength came a new purpose and sense of duty.

Joyous at the prospects of a reconciliation, Jane wrote to Elbert to come at once.

"Jane, dear, you have been so good to me. I can see things differently now," said Bart.

Elbert arrived at the house a few days later, and found Jasper enjoying a quiet philosophical visit with Jane and Bart.

"How are you, Bart?" said Elbert, as he entered the room, extending his hand, just as though the enmity of the years had never existed.

Bart was astonished and drew back at first, and then a confused look came into his eyes.

"I don't know you, sir, or rather I do know you," and his eyes flashed fire. "You belong to the gang of rascals who expect to reform things, don't you? Make men turn against their friends? Set up 'principle' and all that sort of thing? Introduce the millenium into Washington? Change human nature? Change human feelings and human necessities?"

"But, Bart," broke in Elbert.

"Why did you force yourself upon me? Why don't you let me alone? I want nothing from you, sir. Nothing from those who sold me out—understand? I can never forget—never."

"Bart, please," cried Jane, pleadingly.

"You folks keep out of my affairs."

"Bart, you are beside yourself," said Jane calmly. "Elbert has come all the way from Washington because he would do anything in the world for you."

"I am still master," retorted Bart, tottering to and fro, a shadow of his former self.

"Bart, for my sake," pleaded Jane; "for love of me take his hand. For Veo's sake, for Wesley's sake, Bart, for your mother's sake!" There was a tender eloquence that recalled the old days, and the vibrant heart chord was struck.

The mention of his mother softened Bart's smouldering wrath. His lips trembled and his hands shook, and he burst into tears as Elbert put his arms about his old friend and helped him to his chair.

"Land o' Goshen!" shouted Minnie Mary, entering suddenly, and startled at the unex-

pected scene. "I have left them eggs out on the front porch. Merciful Providence, I hope nobody took 'em," and she rushed out of the room, glad of an excuse to leave.

"Bart, you've thrown the old boots away, for a new last," said Jasper, taking his hand.

"And by the Eternal, it shall last, Uncle," said Bart, with tears still in his eyes, as he slipped his arm around Jane.

"Elbert," said Jasper, "let's git. Let's go out into the barn—gee, I thought I was to home—let's go out and swap yarns. If I had a copy of Plutarch——"

"Jane, I have much to say to you," said Bart, when they were alone. "I told Jasper that——"

"Wait, Bart, some other time. Do you not see we are all just happy? That is enough. I am your wife, and I thank God I am your wife tonight." For the first time in years he kissed her as he had in the first days of their courtship, as if he hardly felt himself worthy of such happiness.

"I do not deserve to be so blessed, Jane. For you, I would do anything; I will resign,

withdraw from active politics. We'll have a home in the country, or go to Europe, as you wish. Your love, Jane, is my life's greatest prize, after all."

"Once more your noble self. A woman may dream of position and wealth, but, Bart, first of all she must have love," said Jane, as they went out arm in arm.

Elbert had gone out with Jasper only to meet Mrs. Daniels coming up the steps. She was as brilliantly attractive as ever, and maintained successfully that piquant brusqueness that seemed to draw admirers.

"What, you here?" she said to Elbert, as he graciously ushered her into the house. "You received my last letter?"—eyebrows lifted in query—"my wire of congratulations, also? Mrs. Waldie still in Poplarville, I presume?" with a ferreting side glance.

"No, she is here."

"Then of course I must ask for her. But first, tell me your plans. Will you live at Willard's or take a suite? It is much more convenient and pleasant to have a suite of your own."

"Without Veo, perhaps, the hotel would be better."

"Poor, dear boy, yes, I know. But one's own home is so cozy and independent. Friends may come and go without the gauntlet of curious eyes."

"I have few friends in Washington."

"Really," broke in Mrs. Daniels, with both eyebrows arched and shrugging her pretty shoulders.

"Yes," continued Elbert, pretending not to notice the challenge, "I will throw myself into my work. It is midnight plodding that counts."

"You must not be a recluse. You must mingle with the maddening throng—and make friends."

"Yes, of course, but I cannot hope to have friends until I deserve them."

"You must seek friends as you would votes. You will find me quite unconventional. I believe in asking for things you need, and you will need me as I will need you. Now do not bungle your patronage. I really must take you in hand. For instance, why do you insist on the retention of Waldie?"

"He is a good official and my friend—one to whom I owe much."

"Oh, you guileless creature. Waldie is dead, politically, and you can't afford to break with your party leaders on such flimsy grounds."

"But, my dear woman——"

"It's the truth. Came to see about this very thing. Of course, Waldie expects to retire with the change of administration, and I'm going to see that he does. And as for poor Mrs. Waldie, with her quiet ways and her dainty personality, how could she marry such a rough man?"

"Mrs. Daniels, you are beginning our proposed Washington friendship in a curious way. Mr. Waldie is my friend. I make no apologies for him, and my future contemplates maintaining unreservedly that friendship."

"Please, don't be angry. You know that politics usually makes close friends or bitter enemies."

"You're right," laughed Elbert, "I seem ready to be either."

"Not over Bart Waldie," she said softly, with irresistible charm. "I am glad, and I am sure

we are going to understand each other. My heart went out to you when I heard of little Veo's death."

"Her life was a sweet benediction, my own inspiration. To think she could not have been spared—I feel so lost without her," confessed Elbert. "I'm all at sea—"

"You should not be lonely—she would not wish it to be so. I can help you so much—if you will let me."

It wasn't so much what she said as the way she said it, and the look in her eyes that aroused Elbert to its deeper meaning.

"My life in Washington has taught me to despise sham. You have a brilliant future before you, why shouldn't we make the most of it, right now?"

Elbert saw the necessity for decision in meeting a delicate situation.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Daniels, your aspirations for me are too far advanced to be alluring to one who is yet in the shadow of a great grief. Let us change the subject. I will call Mrs. Waldie—I—if——"

"It is, perhaps, better." Her eyes drooped

and then raised again in that steady, but tender glance that no words can express more vividly. Though she felt a strange sting in her heart, she neither regretted her forwardness nor censured Elbert.

The door opened, and as Mrs. Waldie entered, Mrs. Daniels, the victor in many contests where coquettes conquered, knew that she had lost her first battle with Elbert. The year was divisible by four—she had utilized her privilege and lost.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ancient philosophers observed that the radical changes for better or for worse in the life of individuals and nations come in cycles. These periods vary and seem to develop a paradox now and then, which baffles the accumulated wisdom of the ages. Poets and sages have never yet defined love in the concrete. It still remains among the unexplainable forces in life. It is something as subtle as a zephyr. Bart's determination to abandon his political career seemed to bring a cheerful air to his home. Jane was more supremely happy than on her wedding day. It seemed now as if the happiness of her married life had only begun. Her cheeks had the rich bloom of mature affection. They were leaving the library where they had been talking over plans when they heard the maid arguing with someone at the door.

"You cannot come in; he is not at home."

At the door was Mother Madigan, saying, "Surely, he'll not refuse to see one of his old pals," as she entered. "Tell him that I——"

"Well, my good woman, who are you?" said Bart.

"Oh, he has not forgotten Mother Madigan, Jimmy's mother? Many's the good turn I've done him, mum," said she to Jane. "Done it on the sly, when the wires were crossed or there was a bit of blarney to hand out."

"What do you want?" asked Bart sharply.

"Jimmy's locked up—drunk, last night. Jimmy, my son, ma'am, he is the boss' best worker in our ward. Heaven bless the boy, and betune ye's and all harm, he's got the Boss more votes than all the sports a-runnin'."

"Then, it's money you want? You had better not wait, Jane," said Bart.

"As usual, the law puts it, yer honor," continued Mrs. Madigan. "I am deprived of me daily support. There's not a hap'orth in sight, nor a crumb, and the devil knows how many days Jimmy'll get. I could not find you at the old place; so the officer sent me here."

Bart gave her some money and a note to the officer, and she stopped for breath: "May all the saints—"

"Now, go; and do not come here again," said Bart. "I'm through with politics."

He telephoned for McCutcheon to come to the house, and intimated that a new leader must be selected in his place. It did not take long for the news to spread.

"What is it to be a successful boss—the futile following of a will-o'-the-wisp," continued Bart to himself. "Modern politics is not a business, a trade, a profession—it is the work of a cruel dragon." Then he began writing letters, still commenting aloud. "Clean politics—the kind our reformers call for; might as well call sewers murmuring mountain brooks."

"Lunch is ready, dear," said Jane, entering the room.

"I cannot lunch now, my dear. I expect McCutcheon shortly, and will come in later."

"Come as soon as you can," said Jane, leaving.

A few minutes later found McCutcheon and Schledgemilch in the room.

"Boss, how you vas? I was mit Jimmy when you rung him up; so I come along," said the German, with his familiar asthmatic wheeze.

"What's the muss, old man? You're white about the gills. Who's given you the cold shake this time?" inquired McCutcheon.

"The papers say you'll be retained in office. The old cocks of the ward have ruffled feathers. There is too much limburger in the air. Now, a little subscription from the Boss, discounting salary and fees," said Schledgmilch, with his familiar old wink.

With eyes fixed on the floor and in vacancy, as if not listening to these men, Bart began in a dreamy way: "Boys, I shall withdraw from politics at the close of my term—perhaps immediately," he concluded, starting up suddenly from his chair and brushing back his hair—the familiar mannerism so often cartooned in opposition papers.

"What?" was the exclamation in chorus. "Yes, boys, I am tired of continually striving after something that proves unsatisfactory after you get it, and breaking up your own home to help maintain the homes of peaceful

and respectable citizens," continued Bart.

"Well, not much you don't, until you've divided the swag from the last deal. There's two offices for me; my expenses for carriages and things for the boys—you know." The first inventory of favors was followed by a second: "Four jobs in the Federal Building for me; the drygoods account for Madame Porteo and her flock."

"And a few ten spots for workers dead to rights as a farewell tip when I gets the spots," rejoined McCutcheon.

"Yah! You don't walk out and leave us mit the empty bag."

"Not much you don't. You're on the pious lay today. Come, old man, what will we do without you?"

"Where is the man who preaches, 'Get money, get it honestly if you can; if you can't, why, get it,' eh? Don't it?" chuckled Schledge-milch.

"Boys, it's no use arguing. You know when I make up my mind, it's made up. You know I have never flinched in a fight, but now you can elect Gorgan, the good young man

who calls me a grafter because I insisted upon playgrounds and parks and schools, and had to sprinkle a little lubricant, leaving me a wreck."

"Oh, yes, a good wreck on a \$10,000 salary, fat and fees. Come, divvy up, old man. We'll not get anything from Gorgan—he's got his own fellows," insisted McCutcheon with a grin.

"What do you mean?" inquired Bart indifferently.

"Four thousand. That'll help some to salve our sorrow."

"Boys, you know I've nothing left. You have been well paid. I can't—"

"What about the bath-room pool at Springfield last winter?"

"Four blank checks to bearer," insinuated McCutcheon.

"Not today, boys," said Bart, waving them impatiently away.

"Oh, yes, where did this swell home come from?"

"Mac, do you realize to whom you are talking?" Bart turned on him angrily.

"Yes, Bart Waldie mit the clean record; down on Clark Street. Yah!" rejoined the German.

"Now, lads, you can neither frighten me nor bluff me. I have made up my mind to face the issue and quit this business. You can go the limit."

"Well, we won't quit cold. You get us four thousand or we will make you. You know exposures are what they want these days, and we have the dynamite," said McCutcheon, coming toward Bart with a threatening gesture, "or we'll have a real funeral when we quit."

"Yes, the old man is a dead dog if he goes back on this shicken. I am sick of quidders."

"Get out of here you ungrateful—" Bart pushed them roughly, his eyes blazing as the two slunk back. "Get out of here, quick! you infernal cowards, jail-birds, thieves, parasites, move quick—quick, I say—oh, Jane! My head! My head! I—I—"

With a deep moan, convulsed and purple-faced, Bart fell to the floor.

Schledgemilch and McCutcheon stood like vultures for a moment, then slunk out. Jane entered the room, and rushed to her prostrate husband.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE sunburst of happiness is often followed by clouds and threatening shadows, and when misfortunes begin to arrive they seem to come fast.

The news of Bart's illness spread through political circles and among his enemies who decided the hour had come to strike the blow that should finish him—"put the old Boss out of his misery" they called it. A few of his faithful followers still stuck to the old leader, though the majority now looked for his finish. It was determined to rake up old records and indict Bart criminally, which they succeeded in doing. As the factional fight proceeded, always more intense than an ordinary political contest, they even hinted at a mysterious murder charge, that had to do with the early days when Bart first came to the city from the country.

When Bart was partially recovered from his illness, Jane decided to have him return

with her to her work at Poplarville until the trial, where she found that busybodies, who had been jealous of her in her long years of popularity, had been busy helping along the hints of scandal, and that some friendships had not worn well during her absence. After a bitter village contest in which whispering tongues had been busy, the school board had employed a substitute teacher. Dr. Buzzer's death had let loose the submerged neighborhood enmities of years' standing, and Jasper, who, now keenly realized that the balance wheel was gone, was not able to stem the opposition of Abner Tomer. So the board had concluded by one majority to dispense with Jane's services, for they had felt that since she was the "wife of a Chicago boss politician," who had been indicted on a criminal charge, she could not be the proper person to teach the children, and that "her influence on the children might not be for the good of the community." This decision raised a tumult among the pupils, but the elders with sage nods and glances declared that they knew best, and when Jane returned she found that she had been dismissed. It was

a staggering blow to her pride, but her life had been so thoroughly tempered by endurance of misfortune that, although her hair was turning prematurely gray, she still faced adversity with her old sweet and determined spirit.

A new order of things had been instituted in the village school. When Jane first went to Poplarville, she inaugurated plans, departing radically from the old district school idea, but that was years ago. New ideas were now pushing her methods aside as obsolete. Her plans of developing original, self-reliant personalities among her scholars was supplanted by patented plans of learning-made-easy and short-cuts to diplomas, turning out graduates on a factory plan. The teacher was given a number of pupils to instruct and polish, after the latest theories, which were provided to facilitate a better showing through the bulk of scholars dispatched. Cram, stuff and specialize the children's brains was the order of the day, and Jane, not having been altogether in touch with the latest novelties of the "Teachers' Institute," was declared behind

the times, for Poplarville pupils now read fashion papers and the fad journals of the day, and imitated city ideas like poll parrots. They could stand anything but being "behind the times," for father's land now brought two hundred dollars an acre, where previously it had been assessed for twenty dollars. While new wealth may not have turned the heads of the parents who knew hard work, the children felt that there was something divinely ordained in their inherited good fortune that entitled them to considerations outside the pale of "hired" help with whom their parents worked and appeared with at the dinner table with no thought of calling them servants.

* * * *

A few days later Elbert arrived from Washington. Life in the capital city has been wearisome, and he was always eager for a pretext to return home to visit his mother and Baby Veo.

Elbert decided to drop everything else and to save his old friend, Bart, despite the protest of his party friends.

"Do you realize that defending Bart means the sacrifice of your political future?" said his former school teacher firmly.

"Service to a friend is never sacrifice. Enemies have compelled the authorities at Washington to suspend Bart while charges are pending, but I have not given up. Poor Bart has nothing left."

"We will get along somehow."

"Now, I have a plan," broke in Elbert. "Little Veo is almost three years old, and she can have only one teacher according to my wish, and that is the one who did so much for her father."

"Elbert, I will not be a pensioner," protested Jane.

"I appreciate your feeling, Madame Proud-spirit, but permit me to finish. Kindergartens are a new thing in this section, why not use a portion of mother's home and inaugurate the idea, with Veo as one of your first pupils? I know five other motherless little children who will come to you from Washington."

"A splendid plan, Elbert," said his mother enthusiastically.

"Teaching the very little children is all so new to me," responded Jane, becoming interested in the plan.

"Well, little folks and big folks are built on the same model," said Elbert, smiling as if he had settled the question.

Elbert recognized influences which the conventions of life often forbid mentioning even in a whisper. Active church work or doing something new or striking soon attracts revenue as well as attention. Position and power in a community are not attained without exploitation. The individual who sits modestly in a corner waiting to be discovered is very likely to be overlooked. He believed in energy on one's own behalf, and urged Jane to throw off her reticence and become a leader.

"You owe your talents to society, and besides—besides, it's business," he continued.

"But people will wonder that my talents should blossom forth so suddenly."

"No matter. These social influences are simply irresistible, in religious, commercial, political or professional career."

Elbert's plan was evolved step by step. "Now we will provide for keeping Bart here until the case comes up in Chicago.

The talent of Jane for organization, her

unconscious tact and the charm of personality developed under the stress of misfortune, Even those who had known her intimately were astonished as she attracted an enthusiastic following and patronage from surrounding cities. Bart's executive ability, conducted from his invalid's chair, was helpful in the organization of campaigns for the entertainments given for the benefit of the public library, and a school park in the county seat at Waldboro; Jane also led in a movement for a new club house. This brought her in close touch with the young people all over the district, and Elbert's political friends became enthusiastic allies. The musicians of the community were soon singing oratorios of classic repute as in the large cities.

The Thursday Club, which she later organized, included a large membership of mothers, and provided both literary development and an awakened social activity. Her talks on "home life" attracted those who loved children. They soon recognized that the kindergarten instructor was including parents as well in her roster roll. The "Mite Societies" looked to

her to devise new forms of social entertainment.

In church choirs she was the proverbial peacemaker, and held together the bubble elements which so frequently threaten the collapse of a volunteer chorus, choir organization and congregational singing. She worked incessantly in a semi-public way, and her kindergarten school became a well-patronized and popular institution, and success multiplied friends. Her attachment to little Veo seemed to increase her affection for the little motherless ones, and as she watched the little lives unfold day by day, she seemed to love to help everyone.

While naturally she had many jealous critics, her unassuming modesty and tested worth were recognized in districts far beyond the boundaries of Poplarville. Her talks on "Current Affairs" at the Thursday Club indicated where and how Bart was helping the busy and plucky wife. The newspapers sought her opinions, which seemed to appeal to the masculine mind as clear-headed and sensible. She calmly ignored the petty flings of jealousy,

and her gracious good nature and common sense disarmed the more bitter assailants. Her pathetic history and personal sorrows seemed to deepen the growing esteem.

"Yes, my life is now settled among little flowers," she reflected, as the children crowded about her.

"Mamma Janie is so good," said little Veo, climbing into her lap and putting a rose into her hair.

The tear that Jane quickly brushed away was mingled with joy as well as sorrowful memories of the little child's mother whose picture hung on the wall.

Jasper called himself the uncle of the motherless little one, and every afternoon strolled up "just to see the children."

Little Veo rushed to Jasper as he entered, and taking off his spectacles put them on her own nose with mock gravity.

"Who does Veo love best?" he asked.

"Mamma Janie."

"Ah, tut, tut, tut, who brings you candy when papa is away?"

"Uncle Jasper."

"Well, who do you love best?"

"Mamma Janie."

"You dear little soul; well, love Mamma Jane best if you want to; we all do."

"Yes, there's something to live for in this world besides making gingerbread," broke in Minnie Mary, vigorously dusting the room.

"Minnie Mary, I am inclined to be poetic today. Now the old Greek poet, Plutarch, says," said Jasper, deliberately crossing his legs.

"Have some sense, Jasper," broke in Minnie Mary, "don't let your book-learnin' make a fool of you. We've got too many Greeks coming into town now.

"Yes, I know, but Minnie Mary, we are getting old. I thought that when we died it would be a good idea to have our bones laid away together."

"Jasper Juniper," said Minnie Mary, with a flourish of the duster, "do you suppose I want any post mortem wedding?" and she left the room with a flounce.

"Well, I must be movin'," he drawled, meeting Jane at the door. "You are happy

here, Jane, I hope," he added, as he saw Minnie Mary coming in again and tried to relieve the awkward situation.

"Oh, yes, very happy. Every spot about the dear old place awakens such tender memories. Mrs. Ainsworth was a mother to me when I came here years ago, an orphan girl. The trees are friends, and the birds and flowers all help to keep my little family so happy."

"Yes, I think we owe the progress of our village to those new ideas you introduced into our school years ago. I must be going over the river before noon," continued Jasper. "Jane, you are giving the children a long recess. Veo, come here and give your Uncle Jasper a rousing smack; how do the shoes fit?"

"All yight, all yight," she said, giving him a quizzical look.

"You little midget, you are the picture of your dear mother. You wink that eye as your mother did. Ha! Ha! She's Veo all over again. Here, let my wisp of hair alone; let go, I say. That's just the trick her mother had, Jane. Let go my coat tails, I say, you little witch. There's no candy here. Now

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"Has it? 'Where from a tooth,' " he scratched, "'from a baby—where the
wool is raised on our farms—where—the—farmer—the baby, the home—"
He threw the pen down in disgust

you can't catch me," he said as he ran around the table, stumbled and fell. Veo put her arms about his neck, and he proudly marched to the schoolroom with Veo on his shoulder, calling back to Minnie Mary, "There's nothing like this, Minnie Mary, in Plutarch's Lives."

When the bell rang the children rushed into the house, while Minnie Mary, seated at the piano, painstakingly picked out the chords for the chorus sung by the little ones as they gathered about Jane to hear their morning story.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN a prosecution actuated by hatred and political rivalry, Elbert determined to delay Bart's trial as long as possible, then to hamper the prosecution in the matter of procuring evidence, and to allow passing prejudices to subside. He secured a delay, and while waiting, gathered every possible scrap of favorable evidence for his client. There had been certain political changes and several deaths of men cognizant of the facts that changed the aspect of the case, but it was on the docket and must be tried. He would have been able to handle the perplexities of the case as it had been begun, but discovered his own political rivals were busy.

The day of the trial arrived, the court would not tolerate further delay. Boss Bart appeared again in the court room, now largely officered by new men. Public opinion had been inflamed against the old order of things, and the prospects for an acquittal under the circumstances

seemed improbable. A victim was demanded. The newspapers were full of trial gossip and looked for startling exposures.

Elbert concentrated his attention upon the jury and felt that he had a fighting chance—even as the well-rehearsed testimony of the prosecution poured in upon him. It was too well-organized to break down in cross-examination, but he made a diagnosis of the questions, tracing the motives and impulses of the witnesses. He called four witnesses, offered little testimony, but made it count, and presented Boss Bart's simple narrative, tracing as on a diagram the favors admitted and the perfidy of those who, having profited thereby, now turned against their benefactor. He made an appeal for fair play—picturing the struggle of the wife and Boss Bart, broken down in health, the target of the abuse of those who feared he might return to power.

The prosecution was baited until it became evident that mere justice was a secondary consideration, and that the main purpose was to send Boss Bart to the penitentiary and blast every hope of his return to political life. The

young prosecuting attorney felt his power and endeavored to play a trump card—"We will prove," he said, "that this corrupt and thieving leader, this tool of corporations, is guilty under the charge."

The hard fought case finally drew to a close. Elbert had shown his masterful hand in its conduct. Every charge was beaten down, the tide was turned with a torrent of oratory that nothing could check, and the verdict was "not guilty."

Boss Bart had been acquitted. It was a great hour for him when his old friends gathered about and showered greetings, but political power and ambition no longer lured him, and he decided to return with Jane to Poplarville. Although not old in years, the strain and the realization of the ingratitude of those he had helped to position in public life had aged him. He had never recovered his physical strength after the stroke.

It was a happy party that gathered in the pullman for the home journey to Poplarville. A woman with children entered the sleeping car, and Bart overheard her telling the con-

ductor that she did not have money enough to pay for berths for herself and children. She was returning home with the remains of her husband. Bart's old impulse of generosity asserted itself. He soon learned the story of her husband whom he had known in his political activities, and who had died leaving his family little or nothing but a request to be buried at his old home. He secured a berth for the tired mother and children, who had already traveled several nights. Then he raised a fund among fellow passengers after the little family had retired.

After looking after and comforting the mother and helping to put the fatherless children in their berths, Jane stopped for a moment by the berth in which Bart was sitting.

"Jane, if I should not awaken in time, see that the good woman is helped off at the Junction, and give her this little envelope with money to help her. I'm so tired that I may oversleep. Good-night, dear. I'm so happy that we can still do something for others. Good-night."

In the morning at the Junction, the widow

and her children were given the purse that Boss Bart had left. Jane thought best to let him sleep longer before leaving the train at Waldboro, to change for the branch line to Poplarville. When she finally decided to awaken him, the curtains were drawn, and there came the agonizing cry that tells of life-parting forever, for she kissed lips cold and silent.

Boss Bart had passed away, with his name vindicated, happy with the consciousness of helping others, as he had often done in life.

The Poplarville delegation was there to greet him that morning in his hour of triumph, but the brass band played only a funeral dirge with muffled drums for Boss Bart's last home-coming.

CHAPTER XXX

ELBERT'S first work at Washington had been neglected, and his enemies were busy, but his reward was sufficient in the gratitude expressed during his last evening with Boss Bart, who had called him "his boy" as in the old days. His year's seclusion had also been brightened by frequent visits home to little Veo. On one of the nights of sober reflection he became restless and felt a spirit of depression and discontent creeping over him. He had received an invitation from Mrs. Daniels to dinner, somewhat to his surprise, as he had not heard from her directly since they parted in Bart's parlor in Chicago. Debating in his mind whether to go or not, he looked at his oracle—Veo's picture—on the mantel and the bright eyes seemed to speak to him, saying, "Go, Elbert, don't throw away your life in sorrow.

He had begun to feel keenly the social ostracism of the average Congressman who

just works and plods along on interminable committee reports. It was a delightful dinner party, and he was acquainted with many of the guests, which relieved him of the awkwardness of being entirely a stranger. Mrs. Daniels gave him a warm welcome.

The guests in the receiving line were delayed while Elbert told Mrs. Daniels briefly of Bart's triumphant acquittal and the passing of his boyhood friend.

"It was heroic of you, but I fear you have lost opportunities here. The energetic Ribeaux has been busy."

"Is he here tonight?" Elbert asked.

"No, you jealous boy, he belongs to the other set, but we are great friends." She felt her vantage ground and continued to soothe whatever jealous pangs were awakened. "Why have you buried yourself? I arrived home nearly a year ago, and you have not had the courtesy to call," she continued, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"I must apologize, but—"

"Let me see; it is now Chairman Ainsworth, I believe. You were fortunate in going on that committee."

"Yes, your wise counsel prevailed."

"How like a gallant, but then I congratulate you," she said, extending her hand again as a confirmation.

"Perhaps you had better wait until I have done some work here worth while."

"Well, I shall not think less of you as a mere congressman, but you know how Washington society is graded. In popular parlance starting from the highest grade, the list, according to the tradition of official caste, more strict than that of the Brahmins, reads 'congressmen, clerks and niggers.'"

"Well, I have moved up a notch, anyhow," he said, laughing, "and I may yet reach your social level."

"Mr. Ainsworth, how cruel! I did not mean a reflection."

"You see new congressmen are especially sensitive when it is a question of their social standing."

"Now, what are your plans?" she said later, as they sat down together.

"To prepare for a re-election. My lamented predecessor has borne the brunt of the fight in the distribution of post offices and patronage."

"Perhaps that is what killed the poor fellow," she suggested. "Seriously, the distribution of offices is the most wearing as well as the most hazardous duty of the modern statesman, and that is where we political Red Cross women can help nurse the wounded feelings."

"Well, I have very few political obligations, and I want to do something worth while."

"Introduce a bill, have your name emblazoned in the record, get the newspapers to talking—I love it. You will realize that a congressional career is not a bed of roses. You must be my gallant knight in a political joust that I am planning."

"Surely you are not seeking political honors?"

"Oh, no; I love the excitement of watching others seek and never find. Political combat is at a low ebb, but I am not going to desert you."

"What is my first move?"

"To make a hit," she said decisively. "Watch your opportunity, and deliver an eloquent speech on the floor of the House. Let others drudge for the committee honors."

Elbert recognized the wisdom of his fair friend's advice and re-read again old Memorial

Day addresses and Fourth of July speeches which had coruscated with the patriotic metaphors of ardent youth. He had written them in all sincerity, and vivid word painting and alliterations made them good material for the basis of higher and loftier oratory and epigrammatic flashes for the news dispatches.

With all his preparation, the opportunity did not seem in a hurry to present itself. He felt that his first term was likely to be empty of honors, as he did not possess even a fragment of the Congressional Record to mail to constituents with his signature "franking" the envelope. New honors were slow in coming, and answering his mail, sending out seeds and doing mere messenger work at the departments was becoming irksome.

Toward the close of the session, while sitting in his seat, reading a newspaper carelessly, perplexed as to how to adjust the conflicting requests of insistent constituents, he was suddenly awakened from his lethargy. A bill was under consideration for an appropriation to beautify a soldiers' cemetery. A Southern member made some slighting remarks with

reference to Union soldiers being coffee coolers and bounty jumpers, which made Elbert's blood tingle, as he remembered his father who died from the effect of wounds received in battle. The bill was to come up for final consideration the day following. He at once requested that he be given a portion of the time allotted for discussion, and it was granted, somewhat grudgingly. That night he plunged into the work of preparation, jotting down the scenes and incidents of his father's war experiences that he could recall, anxious to have his speech pervaded with the spirit of his theme rather than to make a collection of mere words.

The proceedings in the House on his red letter day began with the usual routine. At first there was the usual buzz and indifference that greets all except the few noted speakers in the House of Representatives, and even the Speaker's gavel and admonitions failed to establish quiet. "The gentlemen in the aisles will please be seated," roared the Speaker again. Elbert raised his voice above the tumult. There are some voices that always attract attention, but it was Elbert's first speech,

and it took some time for even his rich, resonant voice to penetrate the confusion. Quiet was gradually restored and Elbert was granted a hearing. He lost himself as he proceeded, and his lurid word pictures at first occasioned an inclination to smile amongst his older and more incredulous colleagues. His theme was one in which words could be spoken in a thrilling and dramatic way, and were even of more importance than ideas.

When his time was nearly up, the members began to exclaim from all parts of the house, "Go on, go on," and the speaker announced an extension of time. Elbert had exhausted his set speech, and it was a crisis with him, as he was at a loss to know what to say further. The applause in the galleries had been checked, but they were anxious to do honor to a newly discovered debater loaded with apt phrases and repartee.

Elbert glanced toward the ladies' gallery and saw the face of Mrs. Daniels. She was applauding enthusiastically. The glance was an inspiration, and the words and phrases of his old Memorial Day address came to mind, and he held his hearers spellbound. The

stenographers rushed about and followed him with notebooks in hand as he paced excitedly up and down the aisles. The five minutes' encore speech had made for him a place as a Congressional orator.

The newspapers flashed the news that Elbert Ainsworth was a rising political star and that his speech was a refreshing departure from the humdrum routine of the House. Colleagues crowded about his seat to congratulate him when he had finished. As he was leaving the the House, he met Mrs. Daniels in the corridor.

"My dear boy, you have won your laurels, and I am proud of you," she said, pressing his hand.

"I am so glad you were here," he said candidly.

"When I heard last night you were to speak, I felt that your opportunity had arrived," she replied.

He accepted her invitation to a dinner party, feeling quite contented with himself.

Elbert did not attend diplomatic or military balls, or mingle in the select set, but he found in Mrs. Daniels a social friend who was making

the most of every opportunity for him. With a man's egotism he imagined the dinners she gave must be in his honor, and felt himself a society man.

Amateur musicians usually appreciate the real worth of music, more than those who have taken it up as a profession. They seem to idealize the mystic art of the masters. While they may not render music with professional technique, they can analyze and discuss music. To the professional performers music is a task, and while their work may please, the responsive sympathy of amateur musicians often inspires artistic success, and furnishes an appreciative listener, for listeners are as important as artists.

"It is as great an accomplishment to appreciatively listen to music as to render it," said Mrs. Daniels, confirming this viewpoint one evening, when she and Elbert were having an evening together.

He had been regretting the fact that he had not studied music in early life, and she had just finished the "Evening Song" from Tannhauser, in a sympathetic and cultivated contralto that had the sustaining soulful tones that thrill.

"Why is it I never enjoy a Wagner opera? Il Trovatore always appeals to me more as music," said Elbert.

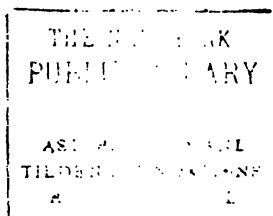
"Because you lack a full conception of the real purpose of opera. Wagner revives the old Greek tragedies. Opera is the musical expression of dramatic art. It is not a combination of concert hall melody, ragtime syncopation and sentiment blended to please the ear-palate—that is not dramatic expression. There is the deeper, subtler soul language of music—too sacred for hackneyed barrel organ arias—it is music not merely to please, but it is a language that translates—"

"Yes, indeed, the language of heaven," mused Elbert. "But you are right; language cannot express emotions that music seems to accentuate, and, Mrs. Daniels, somehow when you sing, the sentiment and emotion have meanings that cannot be expressed in words, and you can even understand songs in a foreign tongue."

He did not intend this as an expression of affection, but it sounded very much that way. Mrs. Daniels continued singing with all the



Oh, he has not forgotten Mother Madigan, Jimmy's mother? Many's the good turn I've done him, mum," said she to Jane. "Done it on the sly, when the wires were crossed"



passionate earnestness of an amateur musician. She sang Schumann's "Liederkreis" and "Dichterliebe," which seemed to enrapture Elbert with its plaintive and expressive note of yearning and ardent love. When she had concluded he broke the silence as if concluding a soliloquy audibly:

"It seems as if the masters of music had attuned the notes to a responsive chord in the human heart."

"You think so?" she replied, with arching eyebrows and a steady gaze. "All have their heart chord. Some particular phrase discloses their heart secrets."

"Does love always find the right chord?"

She answered with a toss of the head and improvised chords on the piano and with a witching turn of the head and a love light in her sparkling eyes that required no words.

They said good-bye that night in the conventional way, but there was a gentler and more reserved manner between them than in former years.

The gossips began to take note of Elbert's frequent appearances at several functions and

dinners with the charming Mrs. Daniels. Society editors hinted as to the coming nuptials of the widow of a well-known army officer and a rising young congressman. Elbert heard of it, but blindly ignored the popular interpretation, feeling that he had merely renewed his acquaintance with an old friend of former years, and continued fluttering about the flame of ripening affection.

Later Elbert sat with Mrs. Daniels in the park, sighing over the loneliness of his quarters.

"Sometimes I feel that I am growing almost purposeless in life." Then he sighed, as if waiting for sympathy: "Lonesomeness seems to drive away the incentive to push onward."

"You think so?" replied Mrs. Daniels with a quizzical look in her black eyes. "You are not compelled to live so frightfully alone," she continued, blushing and looking down again.

He pretended not to understand the suggestion and continued daringly—"But who would care to—"

"Elbert, why do you persist in shutting your eyes?" This was an outburst associated with memories that were sacred. The witchery of

moonlight was complete. He came closer and looked earnestly into her eyes for that soul response which the love message in Veo's eyes had so shyly reflected. But it was not there. Instead there was alluring appeal, vibrant with passion and love, yet mingled with a queenly contempt for all conventional restraints. He could not help recalling old political associations and the possibility that the same cruelty and selfishness might follow any temporary surrender of that powerful intelligence to the softer domination of love. Elbert in a flash recalled Cleopatra, Helen, Lais, Aspasia, and Phryne, who had charmed men of the past, but wore their own silken fetters so lightly.

Bidding her good-night, he left Mrs. Daniels at her apartments more precipitately than gracefully. These two world-wise individuals who thought they understood human nature in others were baffled in knowing just how to make each other comprehend that love is not an expression of words. The gossips continued busy, "while the case is pending," according to Ribeaux's cynical comment.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHEN Elbert walked home down the avenue that night, there was no thought in his mind of the committee meeting on the morrow, where he was to have his test as to personal strength in his party with Ronald Ribeaux. He was so agitated with conflicting emotions within that he appeared a stolid walking automaton as he bumped into the passersby zigzagging across the side streets. He was wondering if he had the genuine symptoms of falling in love. Often he had analyzed the inner thoughts of others in his law practice, but had overlooked himself.

There was a glow of egotistic pride in the thought that Mrs. Daniels had expressed so frankly her admiration for him, and he felt that he might even interpret her feeling toward him as one of true devotion. But he wondered if he could ever marry again. As a rule that question is early settled by the average young widower with a life ambition, for all human beings crave love. Did he really love Mrs.

Daniels? Was admiration love, and was she unreservedly his own? That was the important question. There was certainly not the same feeling for her that he had felt for Veo. To be sure, Mrs. Daniels was beautiful, intellectual and inspirational—"a good match," as the gossips say, and he was attracted to her—yes, he might confess she was extremely fascinating.

Yet, when his yearning heart searched for that earnest simple devotion like Veo's, it was not there. He felt that something was lacking. Her eyes might speak the language of love, but he felt that ambition ruled the heart of Mrs. Daniels. He recalled the details of their last meeting, not only the words spoken, but the very inflections and the glances and the gestures that accompanied the conversation. Then he held up to himself a mental mirror, and his vanity was touched when he realized how foolish he must appear to delay further. He wanted to get his moorings. To marry and then to divorce was to him almost a capital crime, and Mrs. Daniels, who in early life had married an army officer, was a divorcee. As a lawyer, he understood the unglossed motives

of some women in their commercialization of emotion and attendant alimony.

He wrote a hurried note of farewell to Mrs. Daniels, and departed the next day for Poplarville—somehow he had a feeling that the old home would be a harbor of refuge where troublesome problems could be more calmly considered.

There are some things in which the most candid individuals will deceive themselves. Elbert found his actions and ideals were oftentimes illogical and inconsistent. He was not a coward, and yet he felt that he could not trust himself with Mrs. Daniels—at least until he thoroughly knew his own heart. The memory of her various chats at Brussels and at Bart's home was vividly recalled. If she had tired of one husband in early life, why not of another in later years? The details of her early divorce case he had never questioned or investigated, and he found his professional instincts for evidence getting the best of him. He spent a sleepless night over the matter without any rational reason, and this further nettled his pride.

There was something soothing in the quiet

atmosphere of Poplarville after the distracting bustle of Washington life. His unexpected appearance was a surprise to the home folks, who watched the papers closely and proudly and talked over "what our Congressman is doing." He rushed eagerly up the familiar old walk, lined with the cedar trees and saw the form of his little Veo in the window.

"And is my little Veo glad to see papa?"

"Yes, dear daddy, but you look so sorry-like," said the little daughter in the searching and frank manner of children. There was in her eyes a reflection of the tender, sympathetic eyes of the other Veo. And he kissed her again.

Jane came out, and in her simple and earnest greeting, seemed more radiant than ever to Elbert in the charm of her quiet ways and attractive personality. Her prematurely white hair and blooming cheeks were a striking contrast of youth and maturity. Her voice, gentle, firm and decisive, seemed to ring with sincerity as she welcomed her former pupil.

"Oh, mamma, I'm so happy," and Veo left her father to go to Jane.

"Well, Elbert, the school has made quite a new woman of me."

"Not a *real* new woman, I hope," he said in mock surprise.

"Oh, no," she replied, "but with these children life is so refreshing and wholesome to an elderly person."

"Don't talk of yourself as elderly."

"As your schoolteacher, I have a right to expect you to respect my age," she said.

That evening they were sitting together on the veranda talking over the old days. Environment has much to do with directing the drift of thought and conversation. Elbert felt inspired with courage and a feeling of security to be again with the woman whose friendship mellowed in the memory of the past years and who had never seemed to fail in understanding him.

"I have come home for advice," said Elbert soberly.

"Well, as your old teacher, I shall ask you to take your seat and recite," said Jane, pointing to a chair. The selection of a situation is effective in dramatics, so Elbert took the seat in a mock stagelike manner and took her hand without a word. Before she realized it, Jane

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Elbert glanced toward the ladies' gallery and saw the face of Mrs. Daniels. She was applauding enthusiastically. The glance was an inspiration

found herself moving a little closer to him than usual to hear his story.

"Indeed, it is a serious matter. Now do you remember Mrs. Daniels?"

"Perfectly. I have very good cause to remember her."

"She entertains famously in Washington, and has contributed much to my success. I have visited frequently at her home, and matters have suddenly become serious without my realizing it. A direct proposal has been made, and I must act. It came upon me very suddenly, and I confess that I just ran away, or rather unceremoniously departed with only a written good-bye."

"You were always peculiar that way. Do you really love her?"

"Well, I admire her, but something seems to hold me back—makes me doubt—"

"You alone can answer. Your heart must answer. There can be no doubt when the heart chord is struck."

Jane turned to him slowly, laying her hand on his arm and giving him a direct expressive look from her deep blue eyes. He looked at her in surprise, and exclaimed:

"Jane, I see it now, it's—it's—you that I love."

"Elbert, Elbert, you surely forget—" she said, as she drew away with queenly dignity.

"I know it—I feel it—Jane—"

"Elbert you must be rational. It's unreasonable."

"Reason with love? As well reason with a whirlwind. Jane, tonight I have found myself."

Jane looked pale and more queenly than ever as she stood plucking the leaves from a vine which clambered up the veranda where they were standing. "Elbert, say no more about this now," she said, turning to him. "It pains me. Let us just continue as good friends."

This incident occasioned a more reserved attitude between them during the remainder of Elbert's visit, and the scene on the veranda was not referred to by either of them. There was little Veo, whom Jane loved devotedly. She felt that the child might possibly not find in Mrs. Daniels—woman of the world as she was—the love and care that she needed for her true development. When Jane was putting the little one to bed the next night,

the motherless child seemed to divine the situation. "Mother Janie, you are so good to everyone—you love papa, don't you?"

"Yes, dear, we are all good friends," Jane replied softly, stroking her hair.

"Mamma Janie will never go away from little Veo, will she?" questioned the child.

Agnes kissed her in answer, and Veo repeated her usual prayer: "Dear God, bless mamma in heaven; bless papa and bless Mamma Janie. Oh, you're crying. I'm so sorry," said Veo, looking up suddenly.

"Finish your prayer, dear," said Jane, reflecting a serene happiness that had seldom come to her in her life struggles.

Before leaving home the next day, Elbert pressed Jane again for an answer. Day by day it seemed as though their lives had grown closer together. The consciousness of holding each other's affection was now apparent, and Elbert felt that her future should be fortified.

"Jane, let me return to Washington with your promise. Why defy the fate that has brought us together?"

"Listen, Elbert, it makes me very happy to

hear you say this, but you are young, with your future before you. I have passed the first bloom of youth. I am older than you."

"What is that, two precious years," demanded Elbert, "to stand in the way of our love?"

"Wait until you know your heart, and realize the scope of your work. How many wives in their maturity have mourned the lost love that is so often transferred to youth when success comes. Don't you see, my dear, I am still thinking of you as my boy?"

"Jane, youth has passed. We have become tolerant in our sorrow and troubles. You have stood the test of a true heart. Our marriage would only seal the ripened love of maturity, a love born of the true devotion that comes from the heart, not of passion. My love is a craving for the sweet companionship of you—only you."

"But think, Elbert, of your future and that of little Veo. I could not help you in Washington, my life has not fitted me for the duties. What would society and friends say to see you wedded to a woman older than yourself, and your old school teacher?"

"In the light of past years, my dear, I realize that my wooing is prompted by heart experience. If political rivals and factional disputes would consider tolerance, if labor and capital would only understand each other, if the ripened instincts of the heart were to prevail and permit the grace of gratitude to reign supreme, and check the hot passions of youthful envy and ingratitude, what a future could be prophesied for our beloved country."

"Elbert, you are indeed eloquent, and you know my heart is yours. But wait, be patient, because you are only upon the threshold of your career, and I should never forgive myself if I—can't you see the real depth of my affection? You see the aging wives of youth cast off in days of triumph by successful men, for youth and beauty—"

"Nothing can ever blind me to the beauty of your noble and unselfish affection. Your decree shall not stand. I must have you with me. I will yet win my prize."

He grasped both her hands, and looked earnestly into her deep blue eyes, and felt that he could read the answer her lips withheld.

CHAPTER XXXII

POPLARVILLE had slumbered for many years without having a truly sensational event until Shandy Goff introduced bicycles. This brought with it the usual disturbance of progress, but the community was truly shocked when Minnie Mary Snow calmly announced that she was going to learn to ride a wheel in front of the blacksmith shop.

“Now that I have bought it, land o’ Goshen, I have got to ride it,” said she in defence.

“Come, Minnie Mary, I am ready for that spin over the river,” said Shandy, peering in at the door.

“My, I am so flustrated that I don’t know whether I am standing on my head or my heels. It’s like taking the first plunge in swimming. Which foot do I put on first?” she cried, trying to perch on the seat, as the machine wigwagged forward.

The news soon spread over the village that

Shandy was teaching Minnie Mary to ride a bicycle, and there were numerous spectators. While they were rehearsing, Abner and Jasper came up to add to the comment on the awful antics of Minnie Mary and her apparent lack of dignity.

"Just as I expected," growled Abner. "The devil's uppermost in Poplarville these days. No respect for religion, no going to church, no public meetings, no nothin' that's got any sense to it."

"Just the other way," cried Shandy, pumping up his tire. "Everything has grown better except you."

"There—there, what did I tell you, you young calamity spinner—wastin' good muscle on that darn thing instead of plowin' your land?"

"Bicycles are all right when you know how to ride, Abner," said Jasper. "Shandy, let Abner try."

"Me try! I'd sooner get on the devil's broom stick and ride to hell than touch the pesky critter. The oat crop is going to ruin while people are going crazy over these two-

wheel playthings. I never saw the beat of it."

"Minnie Mary, I can't get reconciled to your bloomers," said Jasper. "It might be all right for the Turks—but you have never seemed like a foreign missionary."

"Well, Jasper, you must submit to the advance of woman," said young Dr. Buzzer, coming up. "She has taken to wheels and is not going to depend on wings."

"I'm simply following the edicts of hygiene and Fowler on 'common sense,' Minnie Mary replied, with a bow.

"Your life authority is blasted now, Jasper," said the young doctor, laughing.

"I don't propose to get killed by any skirts getting around my legs, like that woman in Waldboro the other day," said Minnie Mary, unconsciously feeling for her skirts as she zigzagged off the wheel.

"Well, you'd better go to Turkey, seein' that ye want to do like the Turkeys do," shouted Abner after her.

"Well, in the great Roman circus, Plutarch writes—"

"Uncle Jasper, *bicycles* in the circus at Rome? You're a trifle off your history," protested Shandy.

"You're both fit for circus clowns. Better hire to once. They pay good wages, so'm told," said Abner gruffly, with a grunting suggestion of laughter at his own joke.

"Come, Minnie Mary, let's go for a spin," said Shandy as she returned to try to maintain her balance at slow speed.

"Yes, ride to the devil, why don't you?" snarled Abner as the two started off.

"Abner, it's no use. We must keep up with the times and the improvements of the age," said the cheery doctor.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE even tenor of life at the little Kindergarten was resumed after Elbert departed. Elbert's visits always interfered to some extent with the general routine at the school. As Jane desired to keep the single trustee of the school informed as to the progress of the work, she found herself preparing for his visits with more and more care to please him, and his approval naturally pleased her.

A few days after her father had departed for Washington, little Veo, while left alone by Jane in her room, began to rummage the desk. She was looking for paper dolls, and one of her delights was to open sealed letters when Uncle Jasper brought them. She had seen her father open letters, and felt it quite an honor to open his letters. She found a letter in the drawer unopened and proceeded to tear it open. Finding other letters, her busy little hands continued, and the drawer fell out, overturning

the contents on the floor. Just then Jane came in.

"Why, Veo, what are you doing?"

"Mamma Janie, don't scold, I was just opening letters like Daddy, and his drawer tipped itself up."

"Yes, dear. Give me the letters and I'll put them away, and then run and have grandma get you ready for bed."

She smiled at the sweet little face as Veo put up her lips as a token of forgiveness.

Jane stooped to pick up the remainder of the papers and among them she caught sight of a half-torn typewritten letter signed by Bart. She thought it strange that it should be there, as she did not recall seeing it when she had put away the papers. After putting away the remainder of the packages, she started to read the letter by the light of the fire. It was the hour after twilight when reveries seem refreshing. The first words startled her, and her heart almost stopped beating as she read on:

"Jane, forgive me; it was not the blow of a murderer, but a stroke of love—love for you, Jane, but that love was

never returned. When you read this I will be lying in my grave beside Wesley, with no other monument than an accursed life."

Was she dreaming? She read on:

"The night before your wedding was to occur, I met Wesley in the office. He was radiantly happy in your love, and was counting the money and checks which we had neglected to deposit at the bank that day. I stood back of him looking over his shoulder, and a wild maddening impulse came upon me. I struck him upon the head with a heavy cane. It was not a blow of hate, but love. I had no thought to conceal the murder, and simply walked away and left him dead. Oh, it is maddening to recall that night, and yet I seemed then dead to all remorse. It did not seem as if my hand had killed him, but that it was the hand of Providence. Not one minute's meditation was given for the deed. I did not even conceive of the tragic consequences. With the stained hands of Cain, I wooed you, and won your gratitude, which replaced Wesley's love. Oh, Jane, I dare not ask for pity and forgiveness, and yet I knew not what I did. No human lips could justify the deed, but when I am dead, sleeping the sleep of a murderer, you may pity. I write this knowing that my end is near. The future is blank, but death is sweet relief from the hell I have suffered all these years, even in the light of your smile.

BARTHOLOMEW WALDIE."

Her first impulse was to read it again for she felt that it might be only a horrible dream. One more look at the signature—no, there was

no mistaking it. It was Bart's own hand that had penned the words. He had doubtless used the formality of his full name to impress her with the sincerity of his desire for forgiveness. Like a flash, she opened the stove door, and Bart Waldie's confession was burned, yet even on the charred and burned papers the words of his confession seemed to remain quite distinct in the dying embers.

"Even fire does not destroy the blackness of that crime. Oh, Wesley! Wesley!" she cried, on her knees before the fire. "Wesley! No, I cannot believe it—there is some mistake." The grief seemed to tear her very heartstrings.

"Why have I to suffer so much? Oh, Lord, teach me to endure in patience."

The revelation hung over her like a pall.

"A murderer's wife! How can I ever meet Elbert again?" she moaned.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FOR some days Jane went about her work like one in a dream, for the gruesome confessions of the burned letter haunted her day and night. She could not eat or sleep, and her frame was racked with nervous tension. There could be but one result. Minnie Mary found her one morning in a delirious fever. Young Dr. Buzzer was called, and at once realized the gravity of the case. "She has the constitution to pull through," he said to Jasper, "but there is something about this case that I cannot diagnose."

The neighbors took turns in nursing and watching, and, in her delirium, Jane repeated broken sentences of Bart's terrible secret, which had burned into her brain. Soon the tongues of all the gossips were filling the little settlement with the most awful suppositions. Heroic attempts were made by Jasper and the Doctor to stem the tide of popular suspicion by giving out the professional pronouncements

concerning the cause of her illness, but they found things growing worse than if explanations had been attempted with the diagnosis. A version of the confession had already leaked out, and it was further even hinted that Jane had attempted her own life.

When she was convalescent and a mere shadow of her former self, she called Elbert's mother to her and said: "Ask him to remain away—until I am better."

"Why, Jane, what is the matter? You know nothing could keep Elbert away at such a time."

When Elbert approached her bedside the following day, Jane implored him to leave her.

"Jane, you need not fear my alluding to what occurred during my last visit, if it pains you, and remember I am your friend and protector before anything else."

"Elbert, this strain is killing me—"

"My God, is it true that you attempted—"

"No, Elbert," instantly divining his thought, "I would not attempt to take the life God gave me; that would be cowardly, but there are reasons—now trust me—reasons why you should leave."

"Jane, you have not told me what this is all about."

"It is a secret of the dead," she replied faintly.

"Then I must know, Jane. Since we first met in youth, we have been honest friends with each other."

"Yes," she said feebly.

"Jane, you must not drive me away. Tell your friend how to help you. There is nothing I would not do."

"Elbert, an impassable chasm has come between us."

"Then I must know. You are doing wrong to keep it from me. You must let me help fight the battle," he said almost sternly.

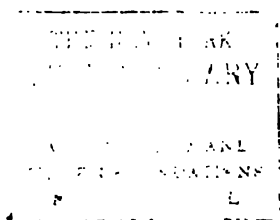
"Elbert, don't wring the secret from me when I am so weak and helpless."

"Jane, you are wrecking more lives than one by refusing your confidence. I will not betray it; trust me."

He leaned closer and she whispered faintly: "Bart was a confessed murderer. He killed his brother Wesley, and I was his wife," she moaned.



That evening they were sitting together on the veranda talking over the old days. . . . Elbert felt inspired with courage and a feeling of security to be again with the woman whose friendship mellowed in the memory of the past



"It is not true! Who has been poisoning your mind?"

"It is true. I found the letter in my desk. I burned it."

"Jane, there is some mistake," cried Elbert, bowing his head.

"It was a signed confession, and I found it the day you left for Washington."

"We must get to the bottom of this matter—."

"Elbert, think of it—I, a murderer's wife. I almost feel as if I should go mad," cried Jane.

"Mamma Janie, do you feel better?" and the curly head of little Veo peeped in at the door. The loving little face of the innocent child brought a feeling of relief and pleasure to the almost heart-broken woman, but her only response was a loving smile.

Through some mysterious source the newspapers scented "a murder mystery," and the files were searched for details of the Wesley Waldie murder in Chicago as the tide of gossip ran. It made a thrilling story, very cleverly put together, for it involved a congressman, and made live headlines for "a romance of

modern life," duly illustrated for the Sunday editions of the "human interest pages."

Horried by the exposure that threatened her life and the effect it would have upon Elbert's career if he still clung to her, Jane planned flight.

That night, although scarcely recovered from her illness, she stole away from her home in Poplarville, having determined to seek new surroundings, and break the ties which she feared threatened to mar Elbert's future. She was willing to make the sacrifice, for she felt that her love demanded it.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE mystery involved in the sudden departure of Jane was the most sensational event in Poplarville since the day that Jerry Doughtoe, standing under the stone bridge, blew his head off with a shotgun. Everything in connection with Bart's confession would naturally be exaggerated with every new telling, but no one could assign a definite reason for Mrs. Waldie's departure. Dr. Buzzer's declaration that overwork and nervous prostration had demanded that she go away for absolute rest were repeated over and over again, using his father's favorite expression to give it emphasis. Overwork is a convenient explanation of such mysteries, and especially when affairs of the heart are to be withheld from the gaze of the curious world.

Search for Jane was made everywhere, and parties started out in every direction. The ponds and the rivers were dragged, for Elbert recalled their conversation of the week previous,

and feared that, in a moment of desperation, Jane had forgotten her pledge; but something told him that she was too brave to give up the life struggle. Pinkertons arrived from the city, looked over the ground, and said it would take time. Elbert delayed his return to Washington until something could be learned of her whereabouts. Little Veo could not understand, and wandered about the house clinging to her grandmother's skirts, piteously crying for "Mamma Janie" to come back to her.

Days passed, and there was still no trace of Jane. Even Elbert's appointment to a foreign mission, heralded as an important political event, which indicated that Mrs. Daniels and his friends in Washington had been busy, excited little interest and less pleasure in the recipient.

He was informed of some of the plots of Ronald Ribeaux, the reformer, and their failure, for Ribeaux's wild and impassioned diatribes in the fight "for the people" against certain corporations, and his exposures of others, had laid bare his own unscrupulous dealings. He approved the claim of all egoists,

that treachery to employers and friends was a virtue. His ambition to attain leadership was ruthless; and all who would not bow to his mandate were brushed out of his way. The one man in Washington and in his own state who stood in the way for his advancement for political honors was Elbert Ainsworth.

There was another reason why Elbert should be safely out of his way. Mrs. Daniels, Hon. Ronald Ribeaux admitted even to his egotistic self, was the one woman who could help him in his ambition to lead in public life. He was in love with her, so far as a man of his nature could love another beside himself, and he became intensely bitter when he realized that Mrs. Daniels looked with favor upon his colleague. As Elbert was away from Washington for long periods, the opportunity was offered. Ribeaux knew the history of Poplarville and its people.

When Elbert received a letter from Jane, telling him more details of the confession and her decision, he realized that she was determined, and the post-mark on the envelope indicated that she was back in Chicago. He

obtained a clew as to where she was residing, and arranged to have one of his friends, unknown to her, secure employment for her, providing protection in his own home. She did not know that the kind stranger had also been a friend of Boss Bart in his palmy days.

Elbert then returned to Washington, feeling that a heavier burden of life's struggles and disappointments must be carried. He had a great problem before him to solve concerning the story of Bart's confession. He had felt from the first that there was some awful mistake if not a deep-laid plot, involving Jane and himself. He intuitively felt that Ribeaux's eyes appeared a little more restless than ever as they looked at him across the table in the committee room. Their relations grew more strained at social functions. It was no secret to him, at this time, that the attentions of Ribeaux to Mrs. Daniels were entirely too calculating and businesslike to be considered as mere love-making. There was little impassioned, natural love-making between them, and the invariable cessation of conversation whenever he drew near, made him feel that

the woman who had avowed her love for him was proving the truth of the old adage "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." She was now apparently more active than ever in assisting new congressmen to straighten out their little misunderstandings at dinner parties, and even more gracious, if that were possible, to Elbert when they met in public, steadfastly assuring him that he was still the one dearest friend of friends, in spite of the incident that neither could ever forget. One day, at a dinner party given by mutual friends, he found Mrs. Daniels even more gracious than ever. Ribeaux was in the adjoining room, and she began talking to Elbert.

"You know, Mr. Ainsworth," she began, with a coy emphasis on the "Mr.," and an arch look towards the other room where Ribeaux could be seen talking to several guests, his eyes wandering from time to time to her, as if he would divine what turn the conversation was taking, "I have come to realize that there is something, after all, in platonic friendship, and you above all men, have taught me what a true friend in sunshine and shadow means."

He nodded, and looked at her, feeling that now was the opportunity to elicit the real purpose of this brilliant woman. The blow must be struck some time, he thought, why not now, cost what it may.

"Yes," he replied, "I have prized such friendships, not only among women, but men. Ever since my friend Bart Waldie died, I have felt that his friendship will ever remain an inspiring memory."

"So you still retain an affection for the man who tried most of all men to crush you?" It was the way she said it and the inflection of the words, as well as the familiar arching of the brows that impelled him to go further.

"Yes, he was true blue, and while he may have done things not countenanced in our day and generation, he played the game according to the rules."

"That is rather old-fashioned in these days of exposures. Progress can come only from knowing the defects of the past, and the exposures of today are the basis on which we plan the advance of tomorrow."

"If advancement is based upon treachery

and perjury, I cannot look for any great advances in the march of prosperity and civilization."

"Yes, but you know Bart was a confessed murderer," and her black eyes snapped as she said the words—"and his poor wife, how I pity her."

There was that in her words that did not have the true ring of sympathy, but rather a sinister purpose, and it gave him the opening that he was looking for.

"How did you learn about that confession?"

"It was a gruesome tale, killing his brother with a cane. Did you ever see a copy of the confession?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Was a cane mentioned in the confession?"

"I think it was—I am not sure, but I think it was published in the newspapers."

This was an unguarded answer, for Elbert knew that the confession had been burned, and that the newspapers had said nothing about a cane; as a matter of fact, it was an ink bottle that the newspapers reported had been used by the murderer. Now he was convinced that the

confession was a forgery and the result of a plot. He recalled what Jane had told him of the letter being written on a typewriter, and signed in ink. He could scarcely believe his ears as Mrs. Daniels replied so guilelessly to his queries, but the one in which she dropped the remark showing that she was familiar with the confession, and her mention of a fact not included in the public reports, led him to feel that here was a clew to be closely followed up. How were the contents of that confession, found by Jane and known only to themselves, known to her?

The next morning he met Ribeaux, the first arrival at the committee room. There was the usual courteous greeting, as far as outward appearances were concerned, between the rivals. Elbert felt that at least two people knew about the forged confession. He called Ribeaux aside in a careless and indifferent manner, as they stood before the cheery fireplace.

"Ribeaux, Mrs. Daniels told me a wonderfully interesting story last night concerning Bart Waldie's confession. She told me things that did not appear in the newspapers," and

he spoke the last words slowly, with emphasis on each one.

"Ah, did she?" said Ribeaux, as he turned carelessly away.

"Yes, she seemed to know the facts about the confession that was discovered in Waldie's home, which I am sure will be news to you. By the way, you know your secretary did not find me at home when he last visited Poplarville. Who was it with him; I don't seem to recall his name."

Ribeaux seemed to grow nervous; there was something in his look akin to the bearing of Mrs. Daniels. He seemed anxious to dismiss the subject, but was shrewd enough to see that it would not do to be too abrupt.

"Yes, it is too bad. Waldie was a good man, and it is a pity that his memory should be so blackened. He certainly was a true friend of yours, Elbert."

"Yes, he was more than a friend, he was a father, and the type of a man that some of us would do well to emulate in these times, when one can scarcely know a friend by spoken word, or written declaration."

Just then Ribeaux's secretary appeared, and Elbert greeted him quickly:

"By the way, Bugler, who was it that was with you out at Poplarville when you came to see me a month ago?"

The secretary gave a nervous start that added another link to Elbert's chain of circumstantial evidence, but did not answer.

"Did you find Mrs. Waldie there when you called?"

"N-n-n-no."

"Did your friend go there?"

"I—I believe he did."

It was clear to Elbert now that Ribeaux and Bugler had something to do with placing the false confession in Jane's desk.

Late one evening after everyone had left the offices in the capitol, Elbert was signing letters when the charwoman came in. She had remembered him because, at Christmas time on several occasions, he had given her gold coins as holiday tips. He had not seen her very often recently. He looked up and said:

"I have not seen you for some time."

"No, I have been caring for Congressman

Ribeaux's office, but was transferred here to-night, I am happy to say, sir."

"Well, I know you will take good care of things."

"Thank you, sir, I will, sir. There was something I have been wanting to talk to you about, Mr. Ainsworth. You know, sir, some months ago, I found several sheets of paper that were in your office signed with Mr. Waldie's signature—some papers I thought he must have signed for you to fill in later."

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I kept them for some time, but you were gone, and one day Mr. Bugler asked me for them and said that he wanted them to fill out some papers for you."

"Did you give them to Bugler?"

"No, sir, Mr. Ribeaux got them from me, said he wanted to use them for you in the campaign."

He thought quickly and said:

"You have a key to Mr. Ribeaux's room? I would like to go there to find some papers that he promised to have ready for me."

Once in Ribeaux's deserted committee room,

he looked about in blank dismay. It seemed like a hopeless errand, but something impelled him to pick up and turn over a blotter that had been on the desk for some time. The corners were yellow with use and age, but underneath he saw in the handwriting of Ribeaux, a portion of the word "Poplarville," and an indistinct line crossed out and erased, but decipherable as "I struck him—" Slipping it in his pocket, he withdrew, carefully locking the door behind him.

Walking slowly down the avenue, he stopped at a corner to buy a newspaper. There, in a remote paragraph, with a Chicago date line, was a dispatch telling of an automobile accident to Nikita Cracovitz, a gypsy woman, who confessed on her death-bed to the murder of Wesley Waldie while alone in his office ten years before, because he had thrown aside her daughter Naomi and was to wed another. In the flash of a newspaper heading, read under the shimmering street lights, the mystery that haunted Jane was revealed like a bolt of lightning out of a heavy and sodden sky. Elbert could scarcely credit his senses.

He began to feel that there was something in that old Buddhistic philosophy, that if you concentrate thought on one wish long enough, it will gradually come to pass. He had neglected everything that had formerly been of interest to him, so absorbed was he in solving this mystery. It was clear to him now. Ribeaux, with Mrs. Daniels' knowledge, had revengefully plotted his downfall by striking at the woman he loved, by secreting the forged confession among Bart's papers where Jane would find it. Mrs. Daniels, too, was in the plot.

The time for the denouement was at hand. That night the first dinner party he had announced was to be given at the "Yilyard," to which Mrs. Daniels and Ribeaux were invited, with many other guests, including members of the Cabinet, Senators and fellow-Congressmen and their secretaries. He had planned it carefully. The room was decorated with roses, and exquisite music filled in the intervals of conversation; in fact it was remarked that it was not one of the routine private dinner parties. Many of the guests

commented both before and after the dinner on the pale face of Elbert Ainsworth. As he arose at the table as the host of those assembled, he seemed moved by some deep emotion. There was a suggestion of Hamlet's vein in his welcoming address as he told the story of a betrayed friend. He described vividly his early career and that of his friend, Boss Bart, and led up to the picture of a forged confession of murder, written with ink as black as the heart of a hellish fiend. The guests were held spellbound with the graphic realism of the tale. The speaker looked steadily at Mrs. Daniels sitting beside Ronald Ribeaux; her cheeks paling beneath the rouge when Ainsworth suddenly declared "the curse of infamy is upon them, and that curse carries with it the mark of a black letter that brands tonight the fair brow of a woman whose guilty love sought to murder—"

There was a shriek as Mrs. Daniels fainted. Ribeaux turned pale, and the guests rushed to restore the prostrate woman and unravel the mysterious meaning of the speech. They now began to understand this strange greeting of

their host and there was enough in the incident to arouse the curiosity of the reporters. The next morning another mystery story appeared. In her delirium while being removed to the hospital, Mrs. Daniels had incoherently told the story of her love for Elbert, which had inspired her to join in the plot to place a forged confession in the desk of the woman she believed had come between her and the man she loved. By means of the forged confession she hoped to win back Elbert, feeling that her rival would never marry Elbert as long as she believed her husband's confession. The reporters had put together the disjointed sentences and made another mosaic murder mystery.

Ribeaux was with her going to the hospital, and when she began to talk, his efforts to suppress the news from the reporters had the usual effect of making them more keen to supply the missing links in the plot. It marked the finish of Ribeaux's political career.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WHAT a panorama of life passed before Elbert as he returned home this time.

There had been joyous and sad homecomings before, but now it seemed as though the sombre shadows of life had been swept away. Now he understood why he had received the coveted appointment to a foreign post. It was evident that Mrs. Daniels and her friends had secured this appointment to have him leave the country in a blaze of honor and prevent him from attempting to learn their conspiracy. He felt that surely Jane must have seen the exposures of the plot heralded in big black headlines in the newspapers throughout the country; but there was one more plea to make before this case was won.

Arriving at Poplarville late at night, he felt that ghostlike silence and obscurity characteristic of a sleeping village, but in the window of his home he saw a light. He knew at once that something was wrong; that instead of

a beacon light of welcome home, it was an omen of danger. He found that little Veo was desperately ill, and every cry of the little sufferer seemed to pierce his heart like a knife, as he watched by her bedside. Through many long vigils he sat, hoping that dawn would bring rest and calm for the little sufferer. How much Jane had been to both of them was now realized more than ever. Surely she would come if she knew. He felt that a mere letter might not be effective, and a telegram might be too much for her shattered nerves at this time; so he inserted in the Chicago dailies, sending a marked copy to her address with a notice in the "Want" column marked—a strange message in the great mass of advertisements. It told a life story in itself, and thousands glancing through the paper for help, stopped and wondered as they read:

TEACHER WANTED—Little V. very low with fever, calls "Mamma Janie." Come quick or too late. E. will not be there.

He wrote it as a last resort, hoping that this would tell the story in such a way that the next day would bring Jane to Poplarville.

The following day the fever abated, but the child continuously called for "Mamma Janie" until he was almost crazed. Even his triumph in clearing up the forged confession seemed to pale in significance when he looked into the little face which reflected the lustrous eyes of Veo. He felt as he carried her about how precious to him was his very own flesh and blood, and how little he could fulfill the place of a mother to his own child.

For a few hours of the afternoon he would walk about the familiar fields, when little Veo was sleeping, and wonder when Jane could come. He had started for a long walk, little hoping to hear any news that day, as all the trains had come in and gone, but during his absence Jane arrived and rushed to little Veo's bedside. She had driven over from Waldboro, the county seat, not waiting for the branch train. When the little one awakened and recognized Jane, she gave a cry of joy. Jane stooped and stroked the curly head and Dr. Buzzer beamed as he took the temperature and felt the pulse. "Simply marvelous how quickly a young body can throw off the fever!"

"I knew you would come back soon, Mamma Janie," she said, "I had such a booful dream about you."

"Now, dearie, you must rest quiet," said Jane, as she sat by the bedside, gently rocking.

When Elbert returned, his mother met him at the door and told him Jane was there.

"Has she asked for me?" he inquired rather anxiously.

"No."

"Mother, I promised to remain away. Send for me if anything happens, and when I can come home."

An exile from his own house, he responded to the call of a neighbor's supper-bell for that night. He felt content, and yet the suspense was hard to bear. Word was brought to him from his mother that he should call and see her and Veo while Jane was taking her walk. He was heavy-hearted as he approached his home, but uttered a prayer of thanksgiving when he saw the smiles on the thin, pale face of little Veo.

"My little girl is getting well very fast, isn't she?" said the father, kissing her and gently caressing her curls.

"Yes, papa, what did you bring me?"

"Bless you little heart, your papa forgot and will go and—"

"No, papa, I'll give you something tonight."

"What is it?"

"Oh, somethin' you'll like."

"Can't I guess?"

"No; something I like, too."

"All right, I'll go down to the store and see what I can find for my little darling."

"No, papa, you just play with me hide-and-seek."

"All right, what will I do?"

"You hide; I'll blind," said the child.

"But where?" he asked.

"Oh, des anywhere, in the closet, 'hind the door," she exclaimed. "One, two, three, four, five, six, get in quick," sing-songed the child, as she hid her eyes on the sofa.

To humor her, he went into the closet. She jumped up and turned the key.

"Veo, Veo, let me out," he cried.

"Just a minute, papa, just a minute."

"But I must be ready to leave soon," he pleaded.

"All right, papa. Hush, hush," she whispered to him in a mysterious way, as she stood guard over her prisoner.

Just then Jane entered the room.

"Why, my little girl is improving so fast," she said, laying off her cloak and kissing the little face tenderly.

"Mamma Janie, I love you so."

"Yes, I know, dear, you are very precious to me, and I am so happy to see you yourself again. What were you doing, pet?"

"Just playin'," and she cast a furtive glance at the closet door. "Mamma Janie, won't you play blind man's buff?"

"I'm afraid you're not strong enough, dear."

"I'm all right—just here in the room."

"All right," said Jane, with a smile, "make me blind."

Veo carefully tied the handkerchief over Jane's eyes, and then shouted in high glee:

"Now feel for me, Mamma Janie, now feel for me."

Jane, with groping hands, approached Veo, who stood sentinel by the closet door. She had unlocked the door, and as her prisoner

stepped out, Jane, in groping for Veo, who had rushed from the room, put her hands upon Elbert.

"Elbert," she cried, startled, nervously trying to snatch off the handkerchief.

"Blind, but now you see, Jane," he whispered, taking her in his arms. "The heart chord has sounded for us with the melody of love's sweet song."

"Oh, Elbert, I am so happy—should I—. Is this a dream?"

"Jane, my own true heart, Jane," he cried, as the betrothal vow was sealed.



For my friend
The Society Room
with sincere regards
regards of the author
& an appreciation
of a loan of books
Faithfully
The Allie
Ruskin
1930



